



# Wildlife Rehabilitators' Association of Massachusetts



## Why Wildlife Matters: The Charismatic Chipmunk

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### Summer 2025 Newsletter

By Stephanie Ellis, Executive Director, Wild Care, Inc.

**The Eastern Chipmunk**, *Tamias striatus* is a rodent in the squirrel family. It is found in temperate forests throughout eastern North America. They avoid closed-canopy forests and swampy areas but can be found in nearly every other habitat. They are a highly adaptable and common backyard inhabitant, especially in locations with bird feeders, gardens and other abundant natural and artificial food sources.

**Diet:** Their diet consists largely of nuts and seeds. They also consume berries, mushrooms, corn, small invertebrates, bird eggs and occasionally small vertebrates such as baby birds and hatchling turtles.

**More Than Just a Cute Face:** Eastern Chipmunks serve important ecological roles. They are a critical prey item for many species of raptors, snakes, and carnivorous mammals like coyotes, foxes and weasels. They also contribute to soil aeration due to their extensive tunneling systems. They help to disperse seeds of the plants and fungus they consume and store in their burrows. Their feeding habits influence plant growth which in turn affects water retention in the soil.

Chipmunk burrowing improves soil drainage, potentially reducing the amount of runoff. Chipmunks eat insects which can indirectly influence runoff by controlling insect populations that might damage plants and reduce their water retention capacity.

**Life Cycle:** The Eastern Chipmunk mates in early spring and late summer in some regions. They are active spring through fall and inhabit underground burrows that can be up to 30 feet in length, with multiple entrances. Chipmunks collect and store acorns and other food materials in their burrows to sustain them throughout the winter. Chipmunks do not truly hibernate. Instead, they go into a state of torpor. Their body temperature and heart rate decrease. They wake up periodically to eat food that they've stored. It's not uncommon to see a chipmunk out-and-about on an unusually warm day in winter in New England.

**Breeding:** Chipmunks are born typically in April or May, and again in July/August in some eastern regions. An average litter consists of 4-6 young. They are born pink and furless with eyes closed. At two weeks of age, they develop fur and their characteristic striped pattern. Their eyes open around 4 weeks of age. Young chipmunks stay in the burrow with their mother and begin eating solid foods around 40 days old. They leave the burrow for the first outing at 6 weeks, and are independent by 8 weeks of age. Chipmunks are sexually mature at one year of age, and typically live 2-3 years in the wild.

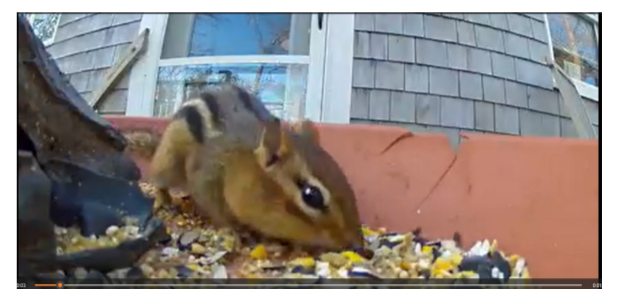
**Cheeks - Who Needs a Shopping Bag?** A classic sighting of a chipmunk is seeing its cheeks stuffed full of food, like little shopping bags. These puffed-up pouches allow them to gather and store food quickly, especially as they prepare for the winter months spent underground.

**Threats:** Chipmunks have many threats including natural predators, rodenticides and other pesticides, illegal trapping and relocation, landscaping and disruption of habitat, lawn equipment, use of snap-traps outdoors, glue traps, vehicle strikes and outdoor cats... to name a few.

**How You Can Help Chipmunks:** Avoid pesticide use in your yard, avoid trapping and relocation. Keep cats indoors. Take note of chipmunk burrow entrances and avoid mowing over those areas, keep cats indoors, use exclusion to keep chipmunks out of gardens. If you find an orphaned, injured or sick chipmunk - contact a licensed wildlife rehabilitator.

**Burrowers, Not Burglars:** Chipmunks may dig tunnels under patios and walkways but do not frequently go into human dwellings or cause structural damage. They rarely enter homes intentionally. If there is an opening into your home with easy access, or if one of their tunnels leads directly into your home by chance, they may enter and search for food. Humane exclusion is key in these circumstances.

Chipmunks are an important part of our natural ecosystems. Their beautiful markings and adorable antics make them one of our most abundant and charismatic backyard megafauna.



VIDEO: STEPHANIE ELLIS

Two summers ago, we received these two baby Eastern Chipmunks from a volunteer in Chatham. Her neighbors were excavating a trench for an electrical line, and a chipmunk nest with two eyes-closed babies was exposed nearly two feet below the surface. Mom was nowhere to be found, and may have perished during the digging. They grew up at Wild Care and were released in the same backyard.



DIG SAFE FOR CHIPMUNKS PHOTO: WILD CARE, INC. KERRY REID



PHOTO: WILD CARE, INC.

This Eastern Chipmunk was found in a glue trap. Wild Care staff carefully extricated and washed it. The chipmunk was later released.



PHOTO: WILD CARE, INC. KERRY REID.

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**FIND A REHABILITATOR**

WE PROVIDE A MAP OF MASSACHUSETTS WILDLIFE REHABILITATORS BY THE TYPE OF ANIMALS THEY TAKE - MAMMALS, BIRDS AND REPTILES. [FIND A WILDLIFE REHABILITATOR NEAR YOU](#)

**FOUND ORPHANED OR INJURED WILDLIFE?**

WRAM IS NOT A WILDLIFE REHABILITATION FACILITY - IT IS A VOLUNTEER RUN ORGANIZATION WHICH DOES ITS BEST TO HELP BY PROVIDING RESOURCES & INFORMATION - [WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE FOUND INJURED OR ORPHANED WILDLIFE](#)