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Wild Evergreen: Squirrels & Chipmunks – Evergreen Audubon

3-4 minutes

Ever see little rodents, or signs of them, in your yard? Well, here are a couple of the usual suspects.



Photo by Marilyn Rhodes

Least Chipmunk

The least chipmunk (*Tamias minimus*) is the smallest species of chipmunk and the most widespread in North America. Their body ranges from less than seven inches to nine inches long (including the tail). The most apparent feature is the five stripes on the back and sides of their small bodies. Two of the stripes extend onto the head. Only the chipmunk has stripes on its face. It can also be identified by its rapid nervous movements. They have large

fur-lined cheek pouches that they use for carrying nuts and seeds.

This species of chipmunk has the largest range of habitat, living from the lowest elevations to timberline and above. They prefer rocky areas and burrow beneath rocks, logs, shrubs and other shelters.

Least chipmunks are not true hibernators. They are in a state of torpor from which they occasionally arouse to feed on stored food. Breeding takes place shortly after this period, and the gestation period takes four to five weeks. Typically there are five or six young which do not leave the nest until they are about four weeks old.



Photo taken by Marilyn Rhodes.

Golden-Mantled Ground Squirrel

This ground squirrel is often mistaken for a chipmunk because of its resemblance. However, it is larger and has no stripes on its head. The tail is also shorter. On its neck and shoulders is a russet to golden “mantle.” Both the golden-mantled ground squirrel and the chipmunk have cheek pouches for carrying food. Cheek pouches allow them to transport food back to their nests

and still run at full speed on all fours.

The golden-mantled ground squirrel is similar to chipmunks in more than just its appearance. Although it is a traditional hibernator, building up its body fat so to survive the winter asleep, it is also known to store some food in its burrow, like the chipmunk, for consumption upon waking in the spring. Golden-mantled ground squirrels dig shallow burrows up to 100 ft in length with the openings hidden in a hollow log or under tree roots or a boulder.

The female gives birth to a single litter of 4–6 young each summer. It eats seeds, nuts, berries, insects, and underground fungi. It is preyed upon by hawks, jays, weasels, foxes, bobcats, and coyotes.

This squirrel's habitat extends from low elevations to well above treeline among rocks and near the edges of woodlands. They are quite brazen as they beg for peanuts and morsels from picnicker and hiker lunches, but please keep them wild by not feeding them.

By late summer, heavy deposits of fat have been stored in their bodies. They move into hibernation with the first snows and colder temperatures. They breed shortly after their hibernation period. Female gestation takes about four weeks giving birth to five young on average. Body stripes start appearing after only about four days.