

Mole

Talpa europaea (Linnaeus, 1758)

Order: Insectivora

Although moles are rarely seen above ground they are easily recognised by their short black velvety fur, their pointed snouts with tiny eyes and their massive front feet. Length (head and body) 113-159mm, tail 25-40mm. Weight 72-128g, males are generally slightly larger than females.

Mole hills and shallow surface runs are an obvious sign of the presence of moles. In damper ground a large 'fortress' hill may be built which contain a nest lined with dry leaves and grass.



Photograph: Daphne James

Moles typically live for about 3 years and they are solitary except for a very brief courtship. The young (3 or 4 in the litter) are born in the spring, weaned after one month and disperse soon afterwards. Moles can live up to 3 years. Moles are active night and day with 4 hour cycles of rest and feeding.

Moles are one of our commonest mammals and can be found in almost every habitat where sufficient food is available. They are easiest to see in open fields and parkland but are also commonly found in woodland. They are generally scarcer in rocky mountains, sandy areas and in coniferous woodland. Moles are generally absent from very wet areas and from intensively urbanised areas. They build an extensive network of tunnels at different levels and patrol this regularly in search of prey which has burrowed into them.

Earthworms form the major part of the mole's diet along with other insects which fall into the tunnel system. Moles have also been recorded eating carrion, frogs, and in Germany, truffles. Moles eat 70-100% of their bodyweight every day. In times of plenty moles store earthworms, paralysing them by biting through the worm's nervous system.

Apart from man, the mole has many natural enemies. Within their tunnels they are vulnerable to badgers, foxes, weasels, and herons. Above ground they are also vulnerable to owls and other birds of prey.

