

## Mole

*Talpa europaea* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Order: Soricomorpha

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 may 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. Mole hills 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.

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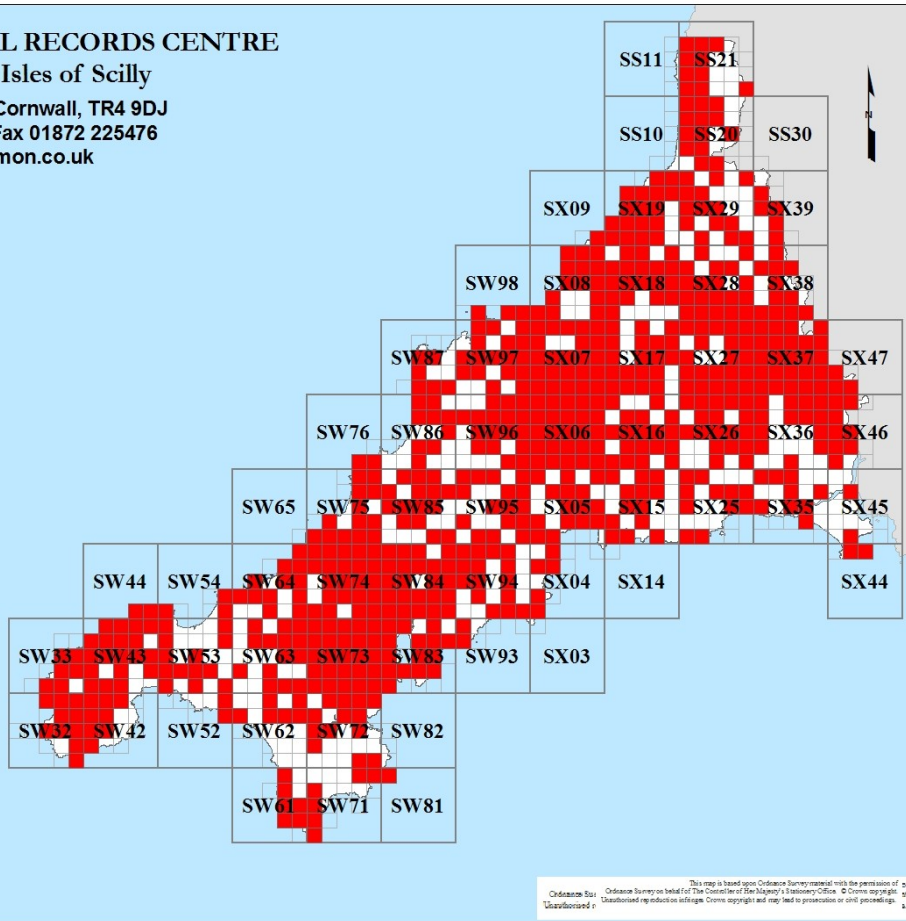


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**Cornwall Mammal Group**  
**Mole**  
*Talpa europaea*  
As of September 2009

**Legend**

- Grid 10 Km
- Grid 2 Km (Tetrad)
- Mole records, 2000-2009



Local distribution and key sites

The mole is widespread in Cornwall in suitable habitat. There are no records from the Isles of Scilly.

***Number of records per date class***

*2002 to 2006 inclusive 1187*  
*1997 to 2001 inclusive 447*  
*All records previous to 1997 247*

The mole is widely distributed throughout lowland England wherever its major prey, the earthworm is found. Moles are not found in Ireland. The mole occurs across central Europe and into Asia north of the Himalayas.

Moles have no specific legal protection in the UK and are often regarded as pests by farmers and horticulturists. Mole hills can cause problems by damaging machinery or by contaminating silage and causing listeriosis in sheep, animals may also hurt themselves by tripping in mole hills or tunnels. Landowners use a variety of methods to control moles although the option of strychnine to poison them is no longer available.

Survey Methods

- Mole hills and tunnels
- Cat kills
- Live sightings
- Owl (and heron) pellets
- Pest controllers

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Did you know?

Also known as moldewarp or unt.  
Moles find their food and communicate mainly using touch. Their small eyes are probably only useful to discriminate light and dark. Moleskin was traditionally used by plumbers to clean pipe joints before soldering. King William III died from complications resulting from a fall when his horse tripped on a mole hill – afterwards his jacobite enemies raised a toast to ‘the little gentleman in black velvet’.

Key references

Gorman, M.L. & Stone, R.D. (1990) *The Natural History of Moles*. Christopher Helm, London.