

## EVERYTHING YOU DID NOT WANT TO KNOW ABOUT MOLES

I will tell you about those pesky little buggers. They have a name; the common mole and they belong to the Mammalian classification; order of Insectivora and family Talpidae and their general species of *T. Micrura*. But, what I REALLY call them would make Abdulla, the camel driver blush!!!

The mole is not very big; about 5¼ inches long and has a cylindrical body with a club-shaped tail. The female is slightly smaller and they have a long snout which is rather pointed. Moles have small eyes that are hidden in the fur; an internal ear that is no more than a ridge. The head and snout have long bristles.

The fur is velvet and very soft to the touch. Usually, it is dark gray to almost black; although, moles have been found that were grey-yellow, orange, cream, or white.

All four limbs are short and enclosed within the skin of the body. The limbs are well forward; the front paws are broad with 5 toes and an extra crescent bone, giving even greater breadth. Each toe has a strong claw; the hind feet are small by comparison but not as weak as they are usually described.

Moles are solitary and are seldom seen together except at maturing times when females will build a nest from 18 inches to 3 feet below the surface and will stack it with dead grass and leaves. They usually mate during late March and early April and the litter is born in 5 to 6 weeks. They are blind, naked, and pink in color and start getting their fur in 2 to 3 weeks. There are usually 3 to 4 moles in a litter but there can be as many as 7 and as few as 2. Young moles leave the nest at 5 to 6 weeks and go out on their own. They become sexually mature at 10 to 11 months old.

The mole is a restless creature and will alternately rest, feed and hunt every 3½ to 4 hours. It is quite common for them to be tunneling right after sun-up, right after noon and at sunset.

Their natural habitat is the forest or woodland areas but they will seek any place that may offer food. They live almost wholly underground, seldom coming to the surface and when they do, it is only for short spells and they are looking for a new run.

Their chief senses are smell and hearing and they have an extraordinary sense of touch at a distance. They can pick up the slightest of vibrations.

Surface runs are primarily for feeding and hunting and they can travel at a rate of 7 to 8 inches a minute. When in an area they have as many as 3 layers of tunnels; surface, as mentioned; another at 3 to 6 inches below the surface (also for feeding); and then a set 18 to 20 inches below for resting. There is no pattern for these tunnels. They seek the path of least resistance or if the soil is distasteful, they will go in another direction. A mole can cover anywhere from ½ to 4 acres with intersecting tunnels. When not digging, he can move rapidly through these tunnels, using a swimlike method. It can move equally well either backwards or forwards. When a large mound is seen in an area of a surface run, this is usually a nesting or resting area and may be a vertical tunnel to as much as 3 feet in depth.

The mole eats insects, wireworms, cutworms, grubs, etc., however, its principle food is earthworms. It cannot survive more than a few hours without feeding and when earthworms are plentiful it may store them. It bites off the tip of the worm's head. With its four teeth it twists the worm into a knot and pushes it into a cavity in the soil. These stores can sometimes include hundreds, even thousands of earthworms. Should the mole not need them, the worms in time regrow their heads and burrow away. When eating a worm, the mole holds it



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down with its' forepaws, bracing the body with its hind feet and chews it from the front end backwards. A single mole will eat 40 to 80 lbs. of food per year. It does not need to drink when feeding on worms, as they are 85% water.

The moles have no natural enemies except possibly man and then only when he leaves a wooded area and trespasses into lawns, parks, and golf courses. There is a long list of remedies to rid moles but most of them are old folklore. But as a personal note, I think at one time or another, I have tried them all with various degrees of results. The examples are:

**Drowning:** Not practical because of the length and depth of runs: you can have water in a lot of places where you don't need it.

**Carbon Monoxide & Other Gases:** again, due to runs, gas can be all over and create some problems, especially on Ladies' Day.

**Strychnine Treated Worms:** somewhat effective but you do not know if you really got him or if he moved.

**Poison Peanuts:** moles will avoid these because they recognize that the run has been disturbed and also they do not normally eat peanuts.

**Trapping:** somewhat effective, but care must be used in setting trap; mole can recognize run has been disturbed.

**Physically Catching:** being at the run when mole is working; kicking him out of the run, then killing. After getting a mole out of the run, don't stand there and admire him; just that quick, he can be back into the ground and gone. I feel this is the best way.

**Distractors:** windmills or anything that will cause vibrations; the moles extreme sense of touch will sense the vibrations and move to another area.

**Chemical Distraction:** Spraying barrier strips with an insecticide using 1½ rate and 6 to 10 feet wide; the mole doesn't like the taste and will move on and will not cross it if it is wide enough.

**John Stephensen, CGCS**