

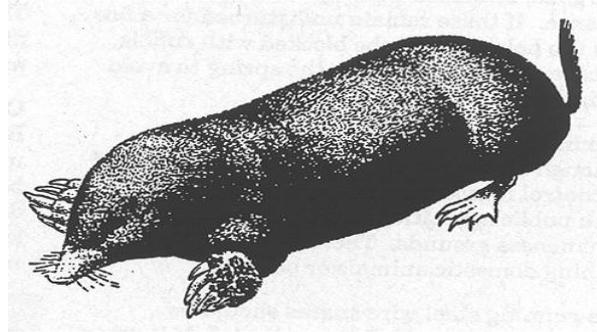
MOLE (*TALPA EUROPAEA*)

APPEARANCE

Moles are abundant throughout Britain except for Ireland, and they spend the majority of their lives below ground. Their fore limbs are well-adapted for burrowing in earth, being shovel shaped and turned outwards to facilitate earth removal. Moles have poor eyesight their eyes being greatly reduced in size. They are about 15cm in length, have a shiny black short coat with a velvety appearance and a short thin tail.

LIFE CYCLE

Moles breed from February to June with only one litter of young being the norm. The gestation period is about 4 weeks and the young are born pink skinned, blind and wholly dependant on their mother. The average litter size is 4 but anything from 2 to 7 is born in a specially constructed extra large mound of earth called a "fortress". The young mature quickly and leave the nest after about 5 weeks.



FEEDING HABITS

Moles do not hibernate and are extremely active creating and extending a network of tunnels below ground. These tunnels are regularly patrolled in search of earthworms, their main food but insect larvae and slugs also occasionally form part of their diet.

SIGNS OF INFESTATION

Moles are solitary and extremely territorial only coming together to breed. The presence of moles is usually noted by the appearance of casts of earth thrown up from tunnels excavated below ground. The quantity of mole hills is not an indication of the number of moles present. Moles are so fiercely territorial that one mole's territory might be as much as 200 m² (½ imperial acre), and even in the largest of garden situations many casts of earth will be the result of one mole. Moles rarely traffic above ground and droppings or surface runs never occur.

DAMAGING EFFECTS

Mole hills are unsightly dotted over ornamental lawns and are particularly damaging on golf greens, bowling greens and playing fields. Damage to mowing machines can occur from excavated stones in mole hills, contacting with mower blades.

CONTROL

Moles can be caught in their underground runs using mole traps, which are set unbaited below ground on a mole's feeding run. Some degree of skill is needed in the setting of such traps but they are usually a very successful method of control. Professional mole catchers use earthworms impregnated with an acute poison called strychnine to kill feeding moles. This practice only has approval for use in agricultural situations and strychnine is subject to strict licensing under the Pharmacy and Poisons Act 1933.

Mole deterrent smokes can be used with limited success, often only moving moles to another area of the garden or repelling them onto a neighbour's garden.

It is suggested in gardening publications that wide topped glass bottles half buried in the earth close to mole hills will deter moles due to the air movement over the bottle mouth creating annoying vibrations through the soil. Traps and mole smokes can be purchased from hardware stores and garden centres.