

# Moles

## Identification

Moles are primitive mammals belonging to the order Insectivora, meaning insect-eaters. They have velvety, blue-black-grey, mohair-like fur. The snout is slender and sparsely haired, with long slim jaws and many needle like teeth. The tail is short and nearly hairless. The stout, short forearms are tipped with outwardly-turned flattened feet and claws. The hind feet are much smaller than the forefeet. Ears and eyes are inconspicuous. The mole can vary in size from 6 to 9 inches.



## Habits

Moles live most of their lives in underground runways. These runways can form vast networks. Moles dig runways to search for food and to provide protection and living space for travel, resting and nesting. The runways are usually about 6 inches under ground level but may be as shallow as 2 inches or as deep as 20 inches.

The annoying molehills are external evidence of the moles' underground tunnelling activities. Moles come to the surface occasionally mainly at night, to search for food, water and nesting material.

## Annual Cycle

Moles are active throughout the year. They do not hibernate. During extremely wet or dry periods, mole activity—by external evidence—seems to lessen. Control programmes will be most successful if carried on during periods of heavy mole activity.

## Food

The main diet of moles consists of earthworms, grubs, beetles and insect larvae. Moles require large quantities of food. They spend half their lives searching for something to eat and can travel up to half a mile a day searching. Most of this travel is back and forth in the burrow and not in a straight line.

## Breeding period

Moles mate from late February to early March, producing young only once a year. The young, averaging three to the litter, are born from late March to early May. Young moles spend about one month in the nest and are nearly full-grown when they leave.

Nests are constructed underground in a fortress-like arrangement in fence lines and well-drained, slightly raised sections of fields. Large molehills (30-40 inches in diameter) or areas of intensive mound-building activity are probably nesting sites. Nest cavities average 9 inches in diameter and about 6 inches in height. Normally 3 or 4 runways lead into the nest. Moles build nests of grasses or moss with a dry, inner pocket surrounded by wet, coarser grasses. Nests normally occur 5 to 18 inches under ground level.

## Control

The nature of the moles food habits makes it hard to poison. Fumigation with lethal gases is sometimes successful in moist, compact, clay soils. The use of deterrents has the advantage of driving the animal elsewhere to find new hunting grounds.

Other control methods include digging out mole nests and shooting or stunning the animals. Moles are sensitive to concussion. Smacking a shovel on the ground near a working mole can stun or kill it.

## Trapping

Set traps at least 1 foot away from molehills to ensure trapping main runways. Probe to locate the runway and probe again to determine the direction of the runway. Using a sharp, straight-edged shovel or trowel, cut a section of runway exactly the width of the trap. Loosen the dirt under the trap jaws to facilitate trap action. In rocky soil, remove all rocks that may bind the trap.

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**South Gloucestershire Council  
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PO Box 299, Civic Centre, High Street,  
Kingswood, Bristol  
BS15 0DR**

**Tel: 01454 868001**

**Email: [Environmental.protection@southglos.gov.uk](mailto:Environmental.protection@southglos.gov.uk)**

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