



Wind in the Willows Fact File: Mole

In Wind in the Willows:

Gentle natured, perhaps rather timid. Keen to look for the best in any situation.

In the wild:

Appearance

The European mole, *Talpa europaea*, has black, velvety fur, a rounded body and a short, stumpy tail. Their powerful front paws are spade-like with sharp claws, and for their size, they are one of the world's most powerful animals. They have a pink pointed snout, small eyes and very poor eyesight.

Diet

Moles mainly feed on earthworms, but they also eat a variety of other small animals including wireworms, leatherjackets, millipedes, insect grubs, slugs and snails. They often store live earthworms in their tunnels - to stop the worms escaping, they disable them by biting their heads off. One greedy mole was found to have over 70 worms stored in a chamber!

Behaviour

Moles live in underground systems of tunnels and large chambers lined with dry grass. They are active diggers and can dig out 20 metres of tunnel a day! The mounds of earth, which they leave behind on the surface as they excavate their underground homes, are known as molehills. Moles are very territorial and will never share territories with another mole. When seen on the move, the mole makes distinctive, bustling, rapid movements, exploring busily with snout and whiskers. They make a twittering sound when excited and also a high pitched squeal. Rapid sniffing sounds made when exploring their habitat may aid general echo-location.

Male (boars) and female moles (sows) mate between March and May. After a gestation of four weeks, females give birth to litters of up to six pink, hairless babies in an underground nest lined with leaves and grass.

Dangers

At five weeks old the young are driven from their home by their mother, living above ground until they find an area where they can create their own tunnel system. Whilst above ground that they often fall prey to owls, rats, weasels, stoats and foxes, while badgers will dig them out of the ground.

Moles are not considered to be endangered and have no legal protection within the UK. Their greatest enemies are farmers and gardeners, who regard them as pests.

