

Moles



Moles are the majority of the members of the mammal family Talpidae in the order Soricomorpha. Although most moles burrow, some species are aquatic or semi-aquatic. Moles have cylindrical bodies covered in fur, with small or covered eyes; the ears are generally not visible. They eat small invertebrate animals living underground. Moles can be found in North America, Europe and Asia.

Terminology: Male moles are called boars; females are called sows. A group of moles is called a *labor*. By the era of Early Modern English the mole was also known in the British Isle as *mould warp*, a name echoed in other Germanic languages such as Norwegian (*muldvarper*), Swedish (*mullvad*) and German (*Maulwürfe*).

Diet: A mole's diet primarily consists of earthworms and other small invertebrates found in the soil. The mole may also occasionally catch small mice at the entrance to its burrow. Because their saliva contains a toxin that can paralyze earthworms, moles are able to store their still living prey for later consumption. They construct special underground "larders" for just this purpose; researchers have discovered such larders with over a thousand earthworms in them. Before eating earthworms, moles pull them between their squeezed paws to force the collected earth and dirt out of the worm's gut.

The Star-nosed Mole can detect, catch and eat food faster than the human eye can follow (under 300 milliseconds).

Evolution: Darwin cites moles as an example of mammals that have organs that have become vestigial and are being phased out by natural selection:



The eyes of moles and of some burrowing rodents are rudimentary in size, and in some cases are quite covered by skin and fur. This state of the eyes is probably due to gradual reduction from disuse, but aided perhaps by natural selection. In South America, a burrowing rodent, the tuco-tuco, or *Ctenomys*, is even more subterranean in its habits than the mole; and I was assured by a Spaniard, who had often caught them, that they were frequently blind. One which I kept alive was certainly in this condition, the cause, as appeared on dissection, having been inflammation of the nictitating membrane. As frequent inflammation of the eyes must be injurious to any animal, and as eyes are certainly not necessary to animals having subterranean habits, a reduction in their size, with the adhesion of the eyelids and growth of fur over them, might in such case be an advantage; and if so, natural selection would aid the effects of disuse.