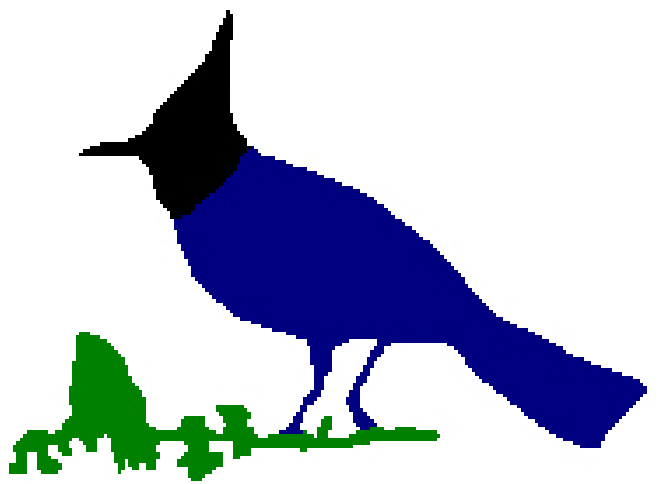


Nature Notes

Winter Survival – the Chipmunk



Once the days get shorter and the nights colder I go looking for my winter jacket and boots. The Yellow Pine chipmunks that live in the Kimberley Nature Park have to work much harder than me.



photo courtesy of e-pic world

Starting near the end of July, chipmunks start to collect and store large quantities of seed, which they forage from the ground or harvest from trees and shrubs. To prepare the seeds for storage the chipmunk holds the seed pod in its dexterous front paws and with specialized incisors it removes the seed. Then using its tongue to shift the seed backwards the chipmunk stuffs the seed in its cheekpouch. Once the pouches are full the chipmunk heads back to its nest to store the seeds for winter.

The grassy nest is located in a burrow with the entrance being well hidden under rocks or bushes. The burrow is about two meters long with a roomy nesting-storage chamber which can be up to a meter underground. The grassy nest is built right on top of the stored seed, an arrangement which makes the winter food supply handy. Chipmunks are solitary animals and each one has its own burrow so there are no problems from having to share.

Once winter arrives in late October or November the chipmunk, who is a hibernator, disappears into its burrow. Once they go into a torpid state their body temperature, rate of breathing and heart rate drop to very low levels reducing the amount of energy needed for maintenance. They wake up every now and then to eat some of the stored food and thus spend the winter.

The Latin name for chipmunk is *Tamias* which means storer, a good name for this engaging, busy little animal.

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