



## SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

# Good Winter Leads to Large Numbers of Chipmunks in US

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Plenty of acorns -- the fruit of the oak tree -- has led to rising numbers of chipmunks in the Northeast United States.

A large supply of acorns on the ground last winter provided food for chipmunks across New England as spring returned. Acorns and other **nuts** are a main part of the animal's diet. They also eat insects, berries, and other kinds of fruit.

The plentiful food supply kept the chipmunks well fed as they got busy reproducing and having families this spring. Now, the growth in the chipmunk population is causing problems in some areas, with people saying the animals are **driving them nuts**.

Shevenell Webb is a biologist with the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife in the state of Maine. She told The Associated Press (AP) that while chipmunks are often **entertaining**, they can be destructive.

The animals burrow through the ground, making holes and passageways. This can lead to the destruction of grass, flowers and other plant life, Webb said.

She added that chipmunks can be "**cute**" and "fun to watch in the forest" as they move in and out of holes like playful children. When their mouths are not full of nuts, chipmunks make an interesting "chip" sound, Webb said.

Steven Parren is a wildlife program official with the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife. He told the AP he cannot grow flowers on his own property without chipmunks digging them up. "They don't even **pause**," he noted.

There were so many acorns in one area, Parren said, that there was no way the animals could have put them all away for winter. In addition to chipmunks, he says he is also seeing more squirrels, rabbits and different kinds of mice this year.

Experts say people should not be too concerned about the summer's larger population of chipmunks. They note while small animal populations can sometimes explode – growing quickly, they usually return to normal.

Chipmunks can be food for other creatures. They are easy targets for owls, hawks, snakes, foxes, and raccoons. But even if they survive such attacks, Webb said individual chipmunks usually only live about three years.

Many New Englanders remember a similar rise in the area's squirrel population in 2018.

Webb said that increase led to a memorable number of road kills. “We’ve never seen anything like that. That was a once in a lifetime event.”

I’m Bryan Lynn.

*The Associated Press reported on this story. Bryan Lynn adapted the report for VOA Learning English. George Grow was the editor.*

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## Words in This Story

**nuts** – *n.* the dry fruit of some trees that grows in a shell

**drive someone nuts** – *idiom.* to make someone upset or annoyed

**entertain** – *v.* to perform for (an audience) : to provide amusement for (someone) by singing, acting, etc

**cute** – *adj.* pleasant and attractive

**pause** – *v.* stop doing something for a short time

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