

THE EUROPEAN MOLE by Dave and Gill Shearing

European Moles (*Talpa europea*) spend most of their lives underground. Although small and rarely seen, Moles lead a remarkable life, leaving only their signature molehills above ground as evidence of their presence.



Moles are marvels of evolution. Perfectly designed for subterranean life, they have powerful, paddle-like forelimbs and velvety fur that lies flat in either direction, allowing smooth forward and backward movement through tight earth tunnels. A single mole can dig up to 20 metres of tunnel a day, creating complex systems in search of one thing: **FOOD**.

They need a *lot* of it. Moles have an extremely high metabolism and must eat almost constantly to survive—consuming roughly their own body weight in earthworms and insects every day. A mole can't go more than a few hours without food. If their supply runs out, they can quickly starve.

To manage this, moles often create "larders," storing live earthworms that have been immobilized by a nip on the head. Some larders have been found containing hundreds of worms. One method of killing Moles was to push Rose cuttings into the tunnels.

The theory is that the Mole will prick its nose on the thorns, and it will not be able to eat enough to make up the blood loss and then die. We tried this method when we lived in Norfolk, and I am not convinced that it works. What we did get, however, were a number of new wild Rose bushes where the cuttings had taken root!

