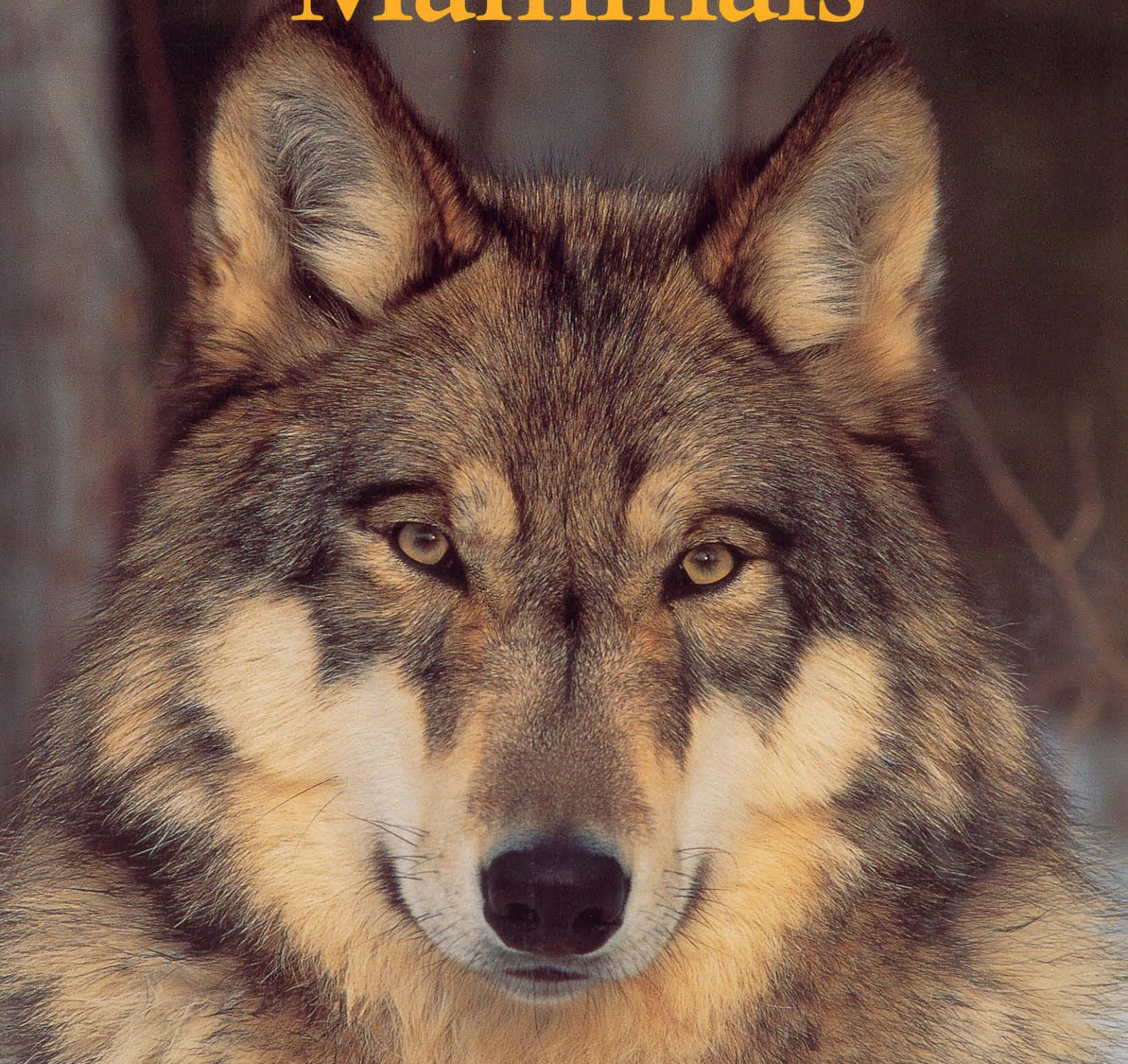


The Smithsonian Book of
**North American
Mammals**



EDITED BY DON E. WILSON AND SUE RUFF

Red-tailed chipmunk | *Tamias ruficaudus*

The red-tailed chipmunk is restricted to southeastern British Columbia, southwestern Alberta, northeastern Washington, northern Idaho, and western Montana. It occurs at elevations of 720–2,400 meters. No fossils are known.

This colorful chipmunk is diurnal. On sunny mornings, it often comes out into clearings and onto fallen trees. It sand-bathes to groom its fur; the body is rolled from side to side in the sand and the animal may even move forward while half-buried in the sand. In late September, when the weather be-

comes quite cold, there is a noticeable decrease in the number of chipmunks. During cold days from mid-November to late March, it stays in its burrow and rarely is seen outside. Males become active earlier in spring than females.

In spring, the red-tailed chipmunk forages mostly on the forest floor, moving through ground vegetation nibbling seedlings, leaves, and flowers, and often stopping to search among leaves and litter. It may forage a distance of 45–60 meters within 3–4 minutes. It hoards food. Manipulation of food



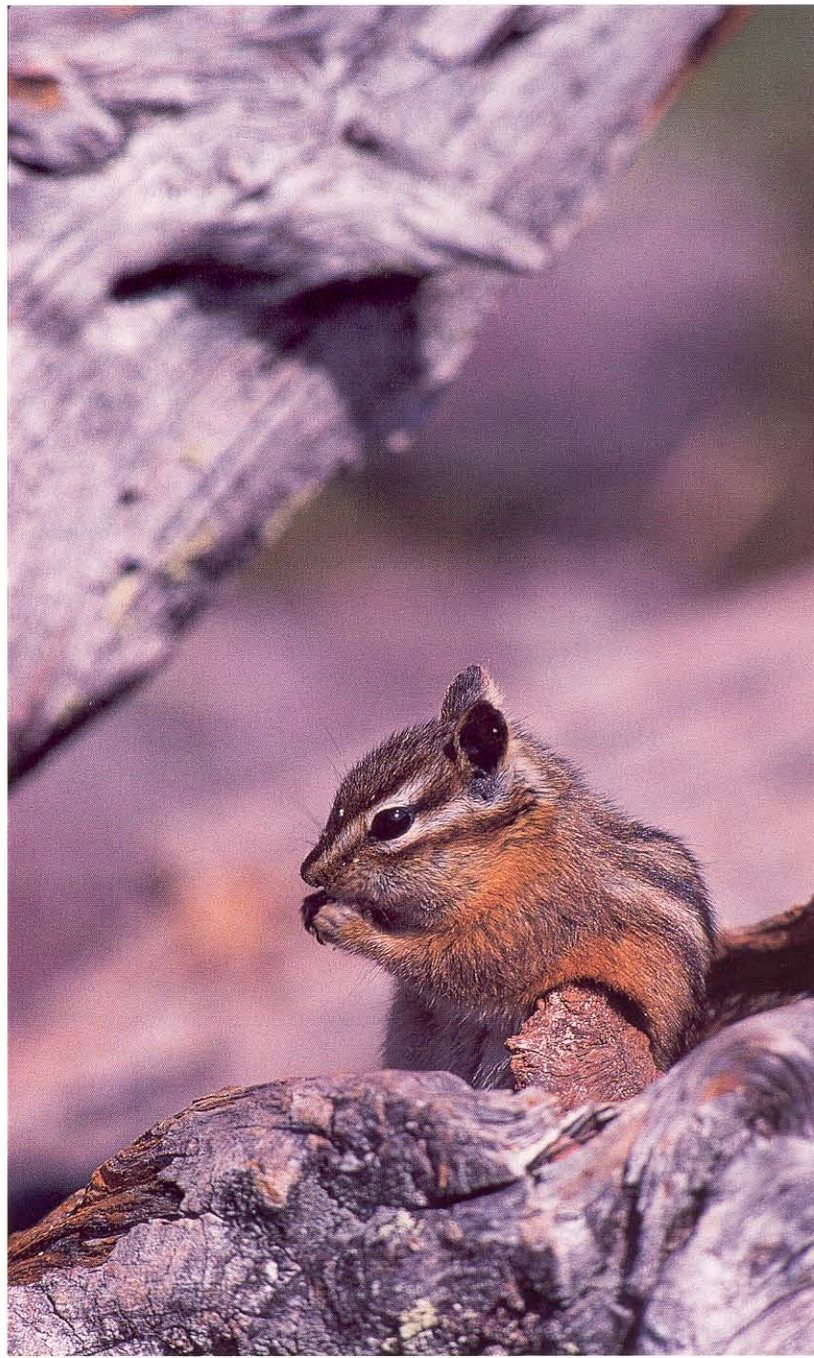
Tamias ruficaudus

is probably to position it so that the lower incisors can gnaw off pieces while the food item is held against the upper incisors. Much foraging is in trees, and it has nest holes in living or standing-dead trees.

A mother and her young usually leave tree nests in the morning and come back at night; they usually visit the tree nest only once in late morning for nursing. The mother leaves the tree nest well before sunrise, but the young wait until the sun warms the nest. The young descend quietly and without delay, and feed or explore near the nest tree. The mother steadily calls during this time. Vocalizations include scolding notes that may run together and produce a trill.

This species is a large, dark-colored chipmunk. The general tone of the back is deep brownish-orange, the five dark stripes are black to brown, and the four pale ones are grayish to creamy white. The underparts of the body are creamy white and washed with pale pinkish-brown. The underside of the tail is brilliant reddish, bordered with black and pale pinkish-orange. The top of the head is brownish-orange sprinkled with grayish white.

The breeding season is from late April to late May, but may be as late as August for some females. Following a gestation period of about 31 days, one litter of four to six young (average is five) usually is born in late May or June. At lower elevations in Montana, parturition occurs from 29 May through 15 June, lactation from 10 June until 25 July, and the first young appear out of the nest on about 11 July, compared with 7–25 June, 14 June–29 July, and 21 July, respectively, at higher elevations. Young are 39–45 days of age at first emergence from the nest.



Although there is considerable turnover in population, some individuals may live 6–7 years; one lived 8 years in the wild.

Tamias ruficaudus inhabits dense coniferous forests and is most abundant in forest openings or edges, where shrubby undergrowth is abundant. It occurs in forests of western hemlock, western red cedar, Douglas fir, and Englemann spruce. The red-tailed chipmunk may be the most plentiful and widely distributed chipmunk in northern Idaho. It is abundant higher in the mountains, and is a common resident of the Englemann spruce-alpine fir association. The habitat is sharply seasonal; there is snow on the ground for six months. Snowmelt begins

in late March or April, depending on exposure and elevation. The population is low following hibernation (May) and reaches maximum size in August. After the peak in August, the active population declines rapidly as adults enter hibernation. By October, the aboveground population is composed almost entirely of young-of-the-year. *T. ruficaudus* usually makes daily movements of 90–150 meters, although some individuals may move 180–270 meters.

The usual nesting site is in crevices in large boulders or under old log piles. Some young use tree dens until they disperse and establish an individual home range; they then dig a burrow in which to build a nest and store seeds for winter. The red-tailed chipmunk eats seeds of fir trees, honeysuckles, lo-

custs, cranberries, and knotweed; fruits and seeds of nine-bark, wild rose, ponderosa pine, snow brush, Douglas fir, service-berry, buckbrush, grass, huckleberry, mountain maple, and bull thistle; and leaves and flowers of dandelion, currant, glacier lily, oyster plant, willow herb, and tarweed. This chipmunk occupies the same habitat as shrews, snowshoe hares, Columbian ground squirrels, red and northern flying squirrels, deer mice, bushy-tailed woodrats, voles, porcupines, short-tailed and long-tailed weasels, striped skunks, coyotes, black bears, elk, moose, mule deer, and white-tailed deer. The only ectoparasite known from *T. ruficaudus* is the flea *Ceratophyllus ciliatus*. No internal parasites are known. *T. L. Best*

Size

Males are slightly smaller than females.

Total length: 223–248 (235) mm

Length of tail: 101–121 (110) mm

Weight: 53–59 (57) g (males); 54–62 (58) g (females)

Identification

Tamias ruficaudus may occur with *T. amoenus* and *T. minimus*. Compared with *T. amoenus*, *T. ruficaudus* is larger, the tail is longer, and the head is more yellowish. Compared with *T. minimus*, *T. ruficaudus* is larger and the tail is reddish.

Recent Synonyms

Eutamias ruficaudus

Other Common Names

Rufous-tailed chipmunk, Coeur d'Alene chipmunk

Status

Common

Subspecies

Tamias ruficaudus ruficaudus, southern British Columbia and Alberta, Canada, western Montana, and east-central Idaho

Tamias ruficaudus simulans, southern British Columbia, Canada, northeastern Washington, northern Idaho, and northwestern Montana

References

Mammalian Species 452; Beg, 1971; Lockner, 1972