

THE WILD SIDE by Dave Gibson

LEAST CHIPMUNKS

The name “chipmunk” is derived from the Algonquin word “chitmunk.” Least chipmunks of the genus *Tamias Minimus* are the smallest of all western chipmunks at 6 5/8 to 8 7/8 inches in length. Least chipmunks are the most widespread chipmunk ranging from Wisconsin to Quebec and the Yukon south to the western United States. The palest North American chipmunk,



their fur is reddish-brown on their upperparts, and grayish-white on the underbody. Five distinctive dark stripes line their backs edged in white with three more stripes under, over, and through each eye. Their tails which are held upright when running are orange-brown.

Least chipmunks are found bordering mixed deciduous and coniferous forests as well as in sagebrush plains. Emerging from their dens in April, they are diurnal feeding within their ¼ acre territory on grasses, berries, fungi, flowers, beetles, grasshoppers, and caterpillars. Dandelions, strawberries, and geranium seeds are among their favorite foods. The chipmunks’ cuteness cannot be denied although it is sometimes hard to appreciate when one has just downed a newly bloomed Indian paintbrush flower on my property.

Five to seven young are born each year and a second litter may be produced if the first is lost. By September they pack their cheeks with sustenance, scurrying back and forth from their burrow’s cache, preparing for the long winter that lies ahead. Not true hibernators, they instead enter a torpor awaking periodically to feed until springtime arrives again.

Dave Gibson is a photographer & writer focusing on the natural world around us. His imagery can be found on his web site at www.davegibsonimages.com