

11/13/55

## Ready To Be Friendly

# Along the Trail By Ken Legg

Chipmunks spend the greater part of their time on the ground, but, to flee intruders or to get food, may climb bushes or go to the lower limbs of trees.

Most of the chipmunks I've seen seemed to prefer dry, chaparral-covered slopes to heavily wooded areas. However, they are widely distributed, occurring every place in the United States except in the southeastern lowlands. Species of mountain chipmunks climb tall trees, and some are found in forested areas.

In Monterey and Santa Cruz counties, we find them in places which are grown to brush or where oaks occur. When we move too noisily into a chipmunk's silent realm, this little squirrel often scurries to a low limb, where he waves his tail from side to side and hurls down insults in a squeaky voice best interpreted as "tsews." These calls are sharp and high-pitched,



This chipmunk, photographed at the New Brighton state park, like all his fellows, is ready to be friends with anyone, but the wise will leave him alone

because along with being amicable, he is known to harbor plague-carrying fleas which do not affect him noticeably but are dangerous to humans.

often causing people to think a bird is calling.

All chipmunks are small; the size of a Norway rat or less, with hairy, but not exceedingly, bushy tails. Rusty brown is the main color. All have four light stripes separated by dark

stripes running down the back.

Chipmunks are sometimes confused with certain ground squirrels which are striped on the back. But chipmunks have stripes on the sides of the head while squirrels do not. They are, however, closer related to ground squirrels than gray squirrels, for, like ground squirrels, they have a little pocket inside the lip for carrying food. Tree squirrels may stuff their cheeks full of nuts, but they have no pockets.

Plants put on new dress and color in spring. Likewise, the coat of the chipmunk is brighter in spring than in winter. They are pretty cute, much petted and easily tamed.

There are more than a dozen species in the United States belonging either to the genus *eutamias* or *tamias*. Literally interpreted, these words mean "one who cuts up and distributes."

The food is seeds, fruit and fungi. Seeds are often cached in excavations made for that purpose. The hole is filled with food then covered with dirt. These caches may be overlooked for one reason or another. The seeds then germinate and begin new plant communities. Some plants are spread widely by such maneuvers of small rodents and by birds. Many chipmunks play an important part in natural reforestation.

The photo is of a bread-fed chipmunk on the wood pile at New Brighton State park. The fruit of the wild coffee berry is probably an item in their diet there.

In spring or early summer the females bear from three to six young. The den is usually underground beneath log, stump or rock, although sometimes abandoned woodpecker holes are used in some local-