

Unusual Behavior of the Eastern Chipmunk

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On 23 October, while approaching a small farm pond created by the reclamation of a surface mine in Breathitt County, I observed an eastern chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*) swimming toward me from the opposite shore. At first glance I thought it was a snake because of its S-shaped swimming pattern, but soon realized that it was not. I remained quiet during the entire journey (approx. 20 m/min = 1.2 km/hr), and it landed quite close to me. It shook its fur and quickly scurried into the grassy hummocks and began feeding.

Such aquatic behavior apparently is not typical. Jackson (1961:146) stated that "it prefers to keep its feet dry, yet when circumstances require it can swim well." Upon observation, I could not determine any circumstances that may have "forced" it into the water. No predators were seen, but may have been present prior to my arrival. It seems unlikely though because the pond was at least 100 m from the forest edge and at least 30 m from the taller grasses not exposed to grazing. Had it been chased by a predator it likely would have sought the safety of its burrow. I suspect it wandered away from its preferred habitat, possibly as a result of the disturbance of surface mining nearby (2-3 km). Certainly throughout the evolution of animals, wandering, whatever

its primary cause, has been a part of range expansion. Evidence such as this suggests that physical barriers like water may not have been a serious obstacle in population movements of eastern chipmunks.

Of particular interest was the chipmunk's manner of aquatic locomotion. Since it is not specifically adapted for this type of environment or movement, one might have assumed it to "dog paddle" its way across a body of water. This was not the case. The entire body was involved in a constant series of S-shaped movements which appeared to use the tail to some degree in a continuous lashing manner for propulsion. One might speculate this to be a more efficient method for aquatic locomotion since the entire body is involved rather than just the appendages which could tire quickly. However, research would have to be performed to obtain quantitative data regarding the energetics in aquatic locomotion in *Tamias striatus*.

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LITERATURE CITED

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