

GETTING TO KNOW WILDLIFE

STITCHES THE CHIPMUNK



By Donna DuBreuil,

President,
Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife
Centre – www.wildlifeinfo.ca

It was mid-summer when the person brought the juvenile Eastern Chipmunk into the Centre for help. He had observed it on his property for several days and noticed a huge tumour on its back.

We were surprised on examining the little fellow that he could still get around given that the swelling was the size of a golf ball and extended from his neck down to his tail. We weren't optimistic when we took it to the Centre's veterinarian for an assessment.

However, several hours later we received a call from the veterinarian telling us that the large swelling was actually tapeworm cysts or larvae. The chipmunk serves as an intermediate host, before often

being consumed by a primary host such as a dog or fox, in the life cycle of the tapeworm.

The veterinarian explained that he was able to remove thousands of the larvae but apologized that it was quite a challenge to suture such a large wound. We saw what he meant when we picked up the chipmunk. He had done an excellent job in stretching the skin to cover the large opening but was unable to match up the chipmunk's stripes.

While the wee chipmunk was none the worse for wear, he definitely had a designer look, with his stripes forming a zigzag pattern down his back. It was how he became known as "Stitches".

We kept him at the Centre on antibiotics for a few weeks to ensure that the wound did not become infected. During this time, he did what all chipmunks we had experience with did for entertainment. When we opened his cage door to feed or medicate

him, he'd make it appear that he was in one corner under the towel but as soon as we pounced, he'd eject like a torpedo from the opposite corner. It then took three of us with butterfly nets to catch him or, more to the point, he tired of the game and let us catch him.

The person who had rescued the chipmunk was delighted that he could be saved and more than happy to share his property with him. In fact, he gave us regular reports on "Stitches" who he continued to see for several years. He did tell us that he put out extra sunflower seeds that first year and that "Stitches" worked overtime putting down his winter cache, having lost a few weeks while at the Centre.

Keep in mind that some species such as squirrels and rabbits are still raising litters of young so give them a grace period before doing any animal-proofing.