

Pygmy Shrew



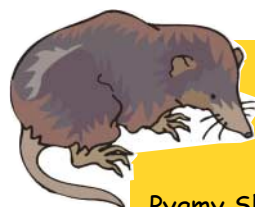
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It is thought that Pygmy Shrews have been in Ireland since the last ice age. They are a protected species here.

Scientific Name: *Sorex minutus*
Irish Name: Dallóg fhraoigh

The smallest mammal in Ireland is the Pygmy Shrew. It is so small it only weighs 3 to 6 grams, depending on the time of year. Shrews live alone, with each having its own territory. They are very aggressive towards each other and will fight other shrews if they meet. They live on the edges of woodland, in hedgerows, bogland, meadows and gardens where they search day and night for food. To keep their bodies warm and in order not to starve, they must eat their own body weight in food every day. Considering they are so small, it doesn't seem a lot but it is when you compare it to the amount of food larger animals eat. They have a very short life-span, living only for about 13 months.

Pygmy Shrews are insectivores, which means their diet is mostly insects. They love all creepy crawlies - flies, beetles, earwigs, spiders and small worms - but they are so small that earthworms are too big for most of them to eat!



What are they like?

Pygmy Shrews are not rodents, like rats and mice are. They are more closely related to moles.

The Pygmy Shrew has a fur-covered body, which keeps it warm in the winter months and a long tail, relative to the size of its body. It has a pointed, whiskered snout, small eyes and ears that are partly hidden by its fur.

The Pygmy Shrew makes a very high-pitched squeak, which most people cannot hear, though some children can!



Their Enemies



The Pygmy Shrew has a few enemies such as foxes, owls and stoats. Domestic cats also catch them but rarely eat them because the shrew has very strong scent glands that most predators don't like. Humans rarely see Pygmy Shrews and are not a threat to them, though in a roundabout way humans may kill shrews by using pesticides.

FACT FILE

Length: 7-10cm

Weight: 3-6grams

Colour: Dark brown and pale grey underneath.

Habitat: The edges of woodland, hedgerows, bogland, gardens and meadows.

Diet: Lots of creepy crawlies, such as flies, beetles, spiders, earwigs and small worms.

Young: It has 2 to 3 litters per year, with about 6 young each time. The young are born blind and weigh only 0.25g!