Articles

**Chipmunks Wear Mini Spy Gear**

*Published September 10, 2015*

Spies are sneaking around Canada's Green Mountains Nature Reserve. But these guys aren't wearing disguises. They're scientists studying how eastern [chipmunks](http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/animals/chipmunk/#chipmunk-cheeks.jpg) communicate.

For the first time, researchers outfitted the little striped animals with collars that contain inch-long (2.8-centimeters-long) microphones—the world's smallest digital recording device. The team used the spy tools to record the constant chipmunk chatter. And what they heard is revealing secrets about how and when chipmunks "talk."

After luring 21 chipmunks into cages smeared with peanut butter, National Geographic Young Explorer Charline Couchoux slipped tiny microphone collars around their necks and released them back into the wild. Then she listened to and observed them from nearby. Each chipmunk wore a different colored tag so she could tell the critters apart.

Along with watching their natural behavior, Couchoux replicated real-life threats. To simulate a predator in the sky, such as an eagle, Couchoux tossed a hat so that it flew over their heads—causing them to raise an alarm called "chucking."

The research also showed that chipmunks will "chip-trill" while defending their territories, "chip" when facing a predator like a snake on the ground, and "trill" when they’re surprised by a predator.

Analyzing the calls has also given Couchoux an insight into their personalities—for example, some are bold and some are shy. By using a few sneaky tricks to get to know these complex creatures, Couchoux is well on her way to cracking their code.

*Text from "Why Are Chipmunks Wearing Mini Spy Microphones?" by Greta Weber, NGS Staff*

*Adapted by Rose Davidson, NGS*

<https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/explore/nature/chipmunks-wear-mini-spy-gear>