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## Scientific Notes

### Rodent Teeth with Pincer Action

were first described in squirrels. The manner in which squirrels crack nuts has repeatedly been observed in recent years. It has long been known that the upper teeth serve chiefly as rests, and that the greater part of the work is done by the lower incisors, which grow continually in order to compensate wear. It was found that the squirrel is able to splay the lower incisors to a considerable extent by approaching the two loosely connected branches of the lower jaw, which are moved by a transverse muscle. It was thought that in order to crack a nut the squirrel gnawed a small hole in the shell, and then inserted the lower incisors, which were forced apart by the action of the jaw muscle, thus bursting the shell. This theory has proved unfounded, as the muscle is much too weak to break the perforated shell. It has, however, been shown that the two lower teeth are used as levers to break the shell after it has been gnawed through. Bechthold has shown that the movability of the lower teeth serves for the squirrel to grip small portions of the kernel, and

*Dormouse with splayed lower incisors. Photo: H. Hediger.*



*Dormouse with "contracted" lower incisors. Photo: Hediger.*

to dislodge them from the shell of the nut. E. Mohr recently demonstrated this forceps-action in mice. It is probable that many other rodents, particularly those related to the squirrel, possess this peculiar ability. Anatomically, the dormouse would appear to be eminently suited to this use of its long incisive teeth, as was revealed during recent examinations of hibernating animals; during this period the dormouse is in a state of natural coma ideal for the purpose of such examinations. H. H.

### The Growth of Finger Nails

is approximately 0.086 mm. per day, that of the toe-nails 0.04, of the great toe-nail 0.06 mm. daily. One millimetre of nail grows in 8.75 days on the thumb, in 7 days the left middle-finger and in 9.83 days on the third finger of the left hand. The little finger of the left hand requires 12 days to grow 1 mm., while the nail of the left great toe shows the same increase in 14.3 days. A layer of nail-cells of the matrix, or root of the nail, reaches the tip or outer edge in about four months. N.

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