

Squirrel

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The **squirrel** is a small or medium-sized rodent of the family Sciuridae. In the English-speaking world, it commonly refers to members of this family's genera *Sciurus* and *Tamiasciurus*, which are tree squirrels that have large bushy tails, and are indigenous to Europe (but not Ireland), Asia and the Americas. Similar genera are found in Africa. The Sciuridae family also include flying squirrels, as well as ground squirrels such as the chipmunks, prairie dogs, and woodchucks. Members of the family Anomaluridae are sometimes misleadingly referred to as "scaly-tailed flying *squirrels*" although they are not closely related to the true squirrels.

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Etymology

The word *squirrel*, first attested in 1327, comes via Anglo-Norman *esquirel* from the Old French *escurel*, the reflex of a Latin word which was itself borrowed from Greek.^[1] The native Old English word, *acweorna*, only survived into Middle English (as *aquerna*) before being replaced.^[1]

Background

Common squirrels include the Fox Squirrel (*S. niger*); the Western Gray Squirrel (*S. griseus*); the Douglas Squirrel (*Tamiasciurus douglasii*); the American Red Squirrel *T. hudsonicus*; and the

Squirrel



Eastern Gray Squirrel, *Sciurus carolinensis*

Scientific classification

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Mammalia
Order: Rodentia
Family: **Sciuridae**

Genera

Many, see the article Sciuridae.



Eastern Grey Squirrel (*S. carolinensis*), of which the "Black Squirrel" is a variant.

Unlike rabbits or deer, squirrels cannot digest cellulose and must rely on foods rich in protein, carbohydrates, and fat. Early spring is the hardest time of year for squirrels, since buried nuts begin to sprout and are no longer available for the squirrel to eat, and new food sources have not become available yet. During these times squirrels rely heavily on the buds of trees, in particular, those of the Silver Maple. Squirrels are omnivores; they eat a wide variety of plant food, including nuts, seeds, conifer cones, fruits, fungi, and green vegetation, and eat insects. Ground and tree squirrels are typically diurnal, while flying squirrels tend to be nocturnal -- except for lactating flying squirrels and their offspring, who have a period of diurnality during the summer.^[2]



Several species of squirrels have melanistic phases. The most common variety seen in urban areas is the melanistic form of the Eastern Grey Squirrel

Predatory behavior by various species of ground squirrels, particularly the thirteen-lined ground squirrel,^[3] has been noted. Bailey (1923),^[4] for example, observed a thirteen-lined ground squirrel preying upon a young chicken. Wistrand (1972)^[5] reported seeing this same species eating a freshly-killed snake. Whitaker (1972)^[6] examined the stomachs of 139 thirteen-lined ground squirrels, and found bird flesh in four of the specimens and the remains of a short-tailed shrew in one; Bradley (1968), examining white-tailed antelope squirrels' stomachs, found at least 10% of his 609 specimens' stomachs contained some type of vertebrate — mostly lizards and rodents.^[7] Morgart (1985) observed a white-tailed antelope squirrel capturing and eating a silky pocket mouse.^[8]

Relationship with humans

Squirrels are generally clever and persistent animals. In residential neighborhoods, they are notorious for eating out of bird feeders, digging in potted plants either to bury or recover seeds, and for inhabiting sheltered areas including attics and basements. While many companies sell bird feeders which are supposedly "squirrel-proof", very few of them really are. Although expert climbers, and primarily arboreal, squirrels also thrive in urban environments that are largely free of trees.



Squirrel eating a nut

Squirrels are sometimes considered pests because of their propensity to chew on various edible and inedible objects. This characteristic trait aids in maintaining sharp teeth, and because their teeth grow continuously, prevents over-growth. Homeowners in areas with a heavy squirrel population must keep attics and basements carefully sealed to prevent property damage caused by nesting squirrels. (A squirrel nest is known as a "drey", especially in Britain.) Some homeowners resort to more interesting ways of dealing with this problem, such as collecting and planting fur from pets (such as domestic cats and dogs) in attics. This fur will indicate to nesting

squirrels that a potential predator roams and will encourage evacuation. Fake owls and scarecrows are generally ignored by the animals, and the best way to prevent chewing on an object is to coat it with something to make it undesirable: for instance a soft cloth or chili pepper paste or powder. Squirrel trapping is also practiced to remove them from residential areas.



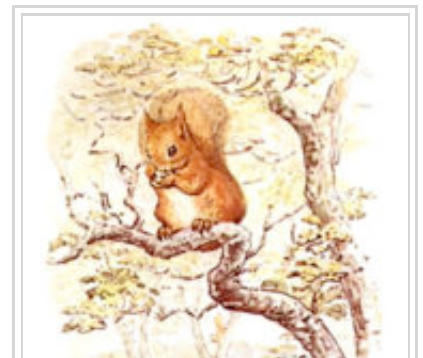
A squirrel in Washington, DC.

Squirrels can be trained to be hand-fed. Because they are able to cache surplus food, they will take as much food as is available. Squirrels living in parks and campuses in cities have learned that humans are typically a ready source of food. Hand feeding is not recommended, however, because squirrels may carry plague or other animal-borne diseases. Even if they do not carry disease, they often have a hard time telling fingertips from food, and bites are painful. Squirrels are occasionally kept as household pets, provided they are selected young enough and are hand raised in a proper fashion. They can be taught to do tricks, and are said to be as intelligent as dogs in their ability to learn behaviors. In these cases, a large cage with ample access to water and a balanced diet with good variety will keep a pet squirrel healthy and happy. As a pet, the owner must be aware of "spring fever" at which time a female pet squirrel will become very defensive of her cage, thinking of it as her nest, and will become somewhat aggressive to defend the area.

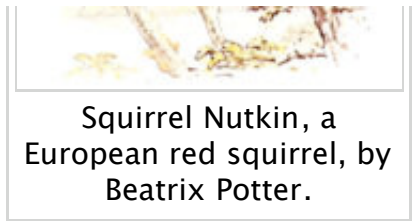
Squirrels are often the cause of electricity outages. The animals will enter transformers or capacitors looking for food. The squirrels are then electrocuted and cause a short circuit that shuts down equipment. Squirrels have brought down the high-tech NASDAQ stock market twice and were responsible for a spate of power outages at the University of Alabama ^[9]. They will often chew on tree branches to sharpen their teeth but cannot tell the difference between a tree branch and a live power line. Rubber plates (*squirrel guards*) are sometimes used to prevent access to these facilities.

Squirrels were responsible for 177 power outages in Lincoln, Nebraska, in 1980, which represented 24% of all outages. Estimated annual costs were \$23,364 for repairs, public relations, and lost revenue. In Omaha, in 1985, squirrels caused 332 outages costing at least \$47,144. After squirrel guards were installed over pole-mounted transformers in Lincoln in 1985, annual costs were reduced 78% to \$5,148. ^[10]

Urban squirrels have learned to get a great deal of food from over-generous humans. One of the more common and inexpensive foods fed to squirrels is peanuts. Recent studies however have shown that raw peanuts contain a trypsin inhibitor that prevents the absorption of protein in the intestine. Dr. James K. Kieswetter of Eastern Washington University suggests using roasted peanuts instead. ^[11] However, wildlife rehabilitators in the field have noted that neither raw and roasted peanuts or sunflower seeds are good



for squirrels, since they are deficient in several nutrients needed. This type of deficiency has been found to cause Metabolic Bone Disease, a somewhat common ailment found in malnourished squirrels.^{[12][13]}

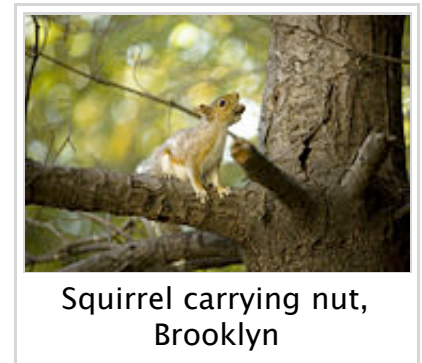


Hunting and food

Until recent times, squirrel meat was considered a favored meat in certain regions of the United States where it can be listed as wild game. This is evidenced by extensive recipes for its preparation found in cookbooks including older copies of *The Joy of Cooking*. Squirrel meat can be exchanged for rabbit or chicken in recipes although squirrel meat is more tender than the latter. Squirrels can often become prey to different dogs that have the speed and agility to catch them. Its light red or pink flesh has only a slight game taste. In many areas of the U.S., particularly areas of the American South, squirrels are hunted for food. However, the American Heart Association has found squirrels to be high in Cholesterol.^[14]

Popular culture

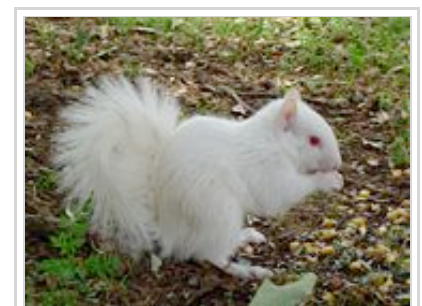
Despite periodic complaints about the animal as a pest, general public opinion towards the animal is favorable, thanks to its agreeable appearance, intelligence and its eating styles and habits. Squirrels are arguably the most successful wild urban animal species. Squirrels are popular characters in cartoons and other forms of media, such as the works of Beatrix Potter, Redwall (including Jess Squirrel and numerous other squirrels), the squirrel Pattertwig in C.S. Lewis's book *Prince Caspian*, the Starwife and her subjects from Robin Jarvis's Deptford novels, Scrat from *Ice Age*, Slappy Squirrel of *Animaniacs*, Sandy Cheeks from *Spongebob Squarepants*, Hammy from *Over The Hedge*, Benny in *The Wild*, Rodney from *Squirrel Boy*, Secret Squirrel, Conker the Squirrel from Rare's *Conker* series of video games, the squirrel-themed super-heroine Squirrel Girl, Foamy the Squirrel of *Neurotically Yours* and Rocky, Bullwinkle's partner in adventures.



Albino squirrels

Albino squirrels are thought by some to be a source of good luck. The Albino Squirrel Preservation Society was founded at the University of Texas at Austin in 2001, and its sister chapter at University of North Texas (UNT) petitioned for an election to name their albino squirrel as the university's secondary mascot. The student body narrowly rejected the call.^[15]

Olney, Illinois, is home of the world's largest known albino-squirrel colony. Kenton, Tennessee, is home to about 200 albino squirrels. Brevard, North Carolina and Marionville, Missouri have a substantial population of white (not albino) squirrels. Western Kentucky University has a locally famous population of white squirrels. Exeter, Ontario in Canada is known for having non-albino white squirrels, believed to be the result of a genetic mutation in the early 20th century.



White squirrels are also commonly seen in Dayton, Ohio and at the main campus of The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. The snow belt in Western and Central New York (Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse), also has a significant white squirrel population.

Albino squirrel at UNT

Red and grey squirrels in the UK

A decline of the red squirrel and the rise of the eastern grey squirrel has been widely remarked upon in British popular culture. It is mostly regarded as the invading greys driving out the native red species. The actual degree of competition has been disputed.^[16]

See also

- Squirrel fishing
- Twiggy the Water-Skiing Squirrel

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Non-albino white squirrel



Squirrel in Central Park, NY

ISBN 0192115790.

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<http://www.unt.edu/northtexan/archives/f06/untnews.htm>
16. ^ The Grey/Red Debate (<http://www.saveoursquirrels.org.uk/red-squirrel-information/the-greyred-debate>)

External links

- Big Collection of The Squirrels Photo. Many photos of squirrels different kinds (<http://belchonock.org.ua/>)
- The Lucky White Squirrels of Exter, Ontario (<http://www.whitesquirrels.ca>)
- The Scholarly Squirrel (<http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Lane/4033/index.html>)
- Russian squirrel pack 'kills dog' – BBC News (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4489792.stm>)
- Garden Wildlife(UK) (<http://www.gardenwildlife.co.uk/>)
- California squirrels defend themselves (<http://www.livescience.com/animals/071227-squirrels-snakes.html>)

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