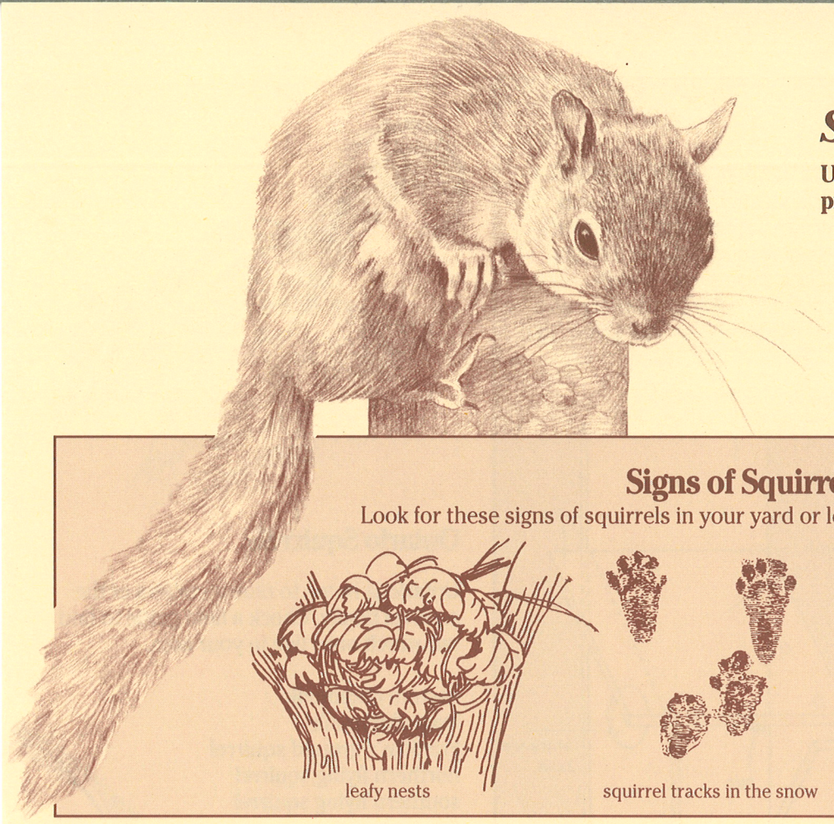


Squirrels Beware!

Unscramble the names of these squirrel predators. Answers are below.

toycoe	netram
low	shrief
ofx	cabbot
sleewa	nylx
wahk	

Signs of Squirrels

Look for these signs of squirrels in your yard or local woodlot, or at the cottage.

leafy nests

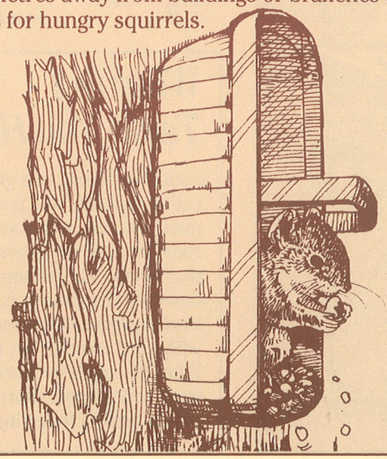
squirrel tracks in the snow

leftovers of nibbled pine cones, especially on stumps

A Simple Squirrel Feeder

You can help local squirrels through the winter and enjoy watching their activities in your yard by inviting them for a meal. All you need is a wooden four- or six-quart basket, some nails and a hammer. Turn the basket on its side and nail it to a tree or post, 1.5 to 2 metres above ground. Face the open side away from prevailing winds. Keep the basket stocked with mixed bird seed, peanuts or sunflower seeds.

To keep squirrels from raiding your birdfeeder, add a large metal cone to the pole below the feeding platform. Feeders should be at least two metres away from buildings or branches that provide jumping-off sites for hungry squirrels.



More about Squirrels

A Field Guide to Animal Tracks by O.J. Murie. Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1974.

A Field Guide to the Mammals by W.H. Burt and R.P. Grossenheider. Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1976.

Animals in Winter. National Geographic Society, Washington, D.C., 1982.

Getting to Know Nature's Children, Volume 19: **Squirrels,** by George Peck. Grolier Ltd., Toronto, 1985.

The Mammals of Canada by A.W.F. Banfield. University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1974.

The Squirrels of Canada by S.E. Woods, Jr. The National Museum of Canada, Ottawa, 1980.

Squirrel Problems?

If you have squirrels in your attic or if they're digging up your tulip bulbs, don't panic. Order FON's publication, "Living with Squirrels" and find out how to solve your problem safely and humanely. Available for $1.00 from the FON, 355 Lesmill Rd., Don Mills, Ontario, M3B 2W8. Please send a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Answers: coyote, owl, fox, weasel, hawk, marten, fisher, bobcat, lynx

When you go for a walk in the woods, do you hear loud rustling noises in the leaf litter, feel acorns and pine cones dropping on your head, or find yourself being scolded by small, bushy-tailed animals up in the trees? If you answered yes to these questions, you live in squirrel country.

Nuts about Squirrels

Written by Pamela Hickman
Illustrated by Judie Shore

red squirrel

gray squirrel

If you have a home or cottage with large trees nearby, you are probably familiar with two of Ontario's most common squirrels: the gray squirrel of the Carolinian and Great Lakes - St. Lawrence forest zones, and the red squirrel, characteristic of the boreal forest, but found throughout Ontario forests.

Have you ever wondered how squirrels perform their tight-rope walks along the hydro wires on your street, or make death-defying leaps from tree to tree? Squirrels are very well adapted to a life off the ground. Their strong, sharp claws are perfect for climbing and their long, bushy tails help them balance when climbing, and jumping. During a jump from high up, gray and red squirrels spread their legs and hold their tail out to slow their fall. The closely related flying squirrels are superbly adapted for jumping. The thin folds of fur-covered skin that extend from their wrists to their ankles act like a parachute during jumps, helping the squirrels glide through the air. Their flat, feathery tail is used as a rudder and stabilizer to guide them to their landing site. A squirrel's large eyes are excellent for judging distances and finding good landing spots when jumping.

Shell helps!

*This **Seasons'** Children's Supplement is generously supported by* **Shell Canada**

FEDERATION OF Ontario Naturalists

355 Lesmill Rd., Don Mills, Ontario M3B 2W8 (416) 444-8419 Fax (416) 444-9866

Family Life

Gray squirrels mate in January and produce an average litter of two to three young in March. Baby squirrels are born hairless, with their eyes and ears sealed shut. At 21 days their lower incisors (front teeth) grow in and their back is covered with hair; at 24 to 28 days their ears open; at 28 days they develop silvery-haired tails; and at 32 to 37 days their eyes open. By the end of twelve weeks, the young are ready for life on their own. Another litter may be born in July. Red squirrels mate in February or March, producing an average of three to five young in April or May. A summer litter may also be born in August or September in southern Ontario populations.

These young eastern gray squirrels are from the same family, but one is gray and the other is black.

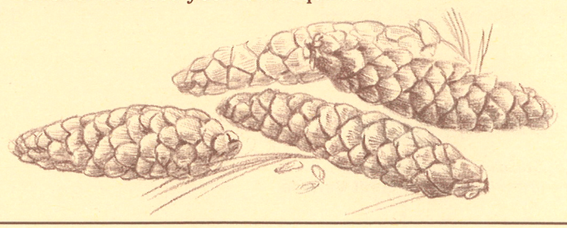
Bill Ivy

Preparing for Winter

Have you ever been accused of "squirelling away" things? This expression comes from a squirrel's habit of gathering and storing lots of food in preparation for winter. In the fall, watch the squirrels in your neighbourhood. Chances are they will be clipping cones from tree branches, carrying food or burying it in the ground. Hard nuts are buried singly in shallow holes dug in the ground, while cones are either buried (red squirrels) or stored in tidy piles above ground (red and gray squirrels). Fruits and mushrooms are stashed in the forks of trees where they can dry out and so they won't rot. Although not all of the buried food is retrieved, squirrels are equipped with an excellent sense of smell for sniffing out stored food (they don't really remember where they bury it), even under the snow.

In preparation for winter's cold weather, squirrels moult in the fall, replacing their summer coat with a thick, short undercoat of fur covered with long guard hairs that keep off the snow and rain. They also grow fur on the soles of their feet for warmth and to make it easier to grip icy and wet branches. The fall moult starts on the squirrel's rump and moves forward, but in the spring, the moult begins on the head and progresses to the rump. A squirrel's tail hairs are replaced only once a year - in August. Their bushy tail serves as an umbrella in the wet and a blanket in the cold.

During winter, gray squirrels prefer to den in a hole in a tree, but red squirrels seek shelter in underground tunnels dug under tree stumps or roots, a fallen tree or a rock pile. Although they may stay indoors during cold snaps or winter storms, gray and red squirrels are usually active during the winter. Keep a look out for squirrels digging up buried food or even raiding your birdfeeder this winter. Their entertaining, year-round activity makes squirrels a welcome addition to your backyard. Read on to find out how you can help shelter and feed your local squirrels.



Squirrel Homes

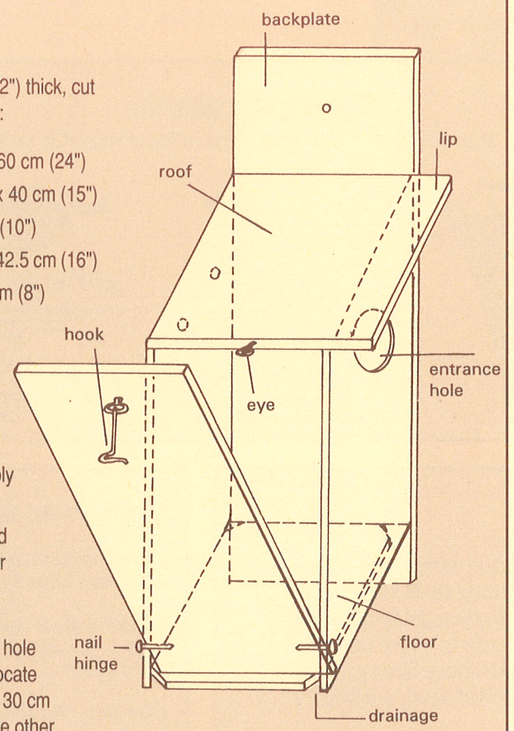
During the summer, red and gray squirrels construct leafy nests in the crotches of trees to keep themselves sheltered from wind and rain. Red squirrels may also use an abandoned crow or hawk nest. When you're walking in the woods, look for squirrel nests in large trees. For winter, gray squirrels prefer a natural tree cavity or abandoned woodpecker hole. Since these are not always available, you can help a local squirrel find a home by building and setting up a squirrel nesting box in your backyard or at the cottage. Ask an adult to help you with this project.

You'll need:

- wood that is 1.25 cm (1/2") thick, cut into the following pieces:

1 back plate: 20 cm (8") x 60 cm (24")
1 front plate: 17.5 cm (7") x 40 cm (15")
1 roof: 20 cm (8") x 25 cm (10")
2 side plates: 20 cm (8") x 42.5 cm (16")
1 floor: 17.5 cm (7") x 20 cm (8")

- 2 lag screws
- 2 nails
- drill
- hammer
- 1 hook-and-eye assembly



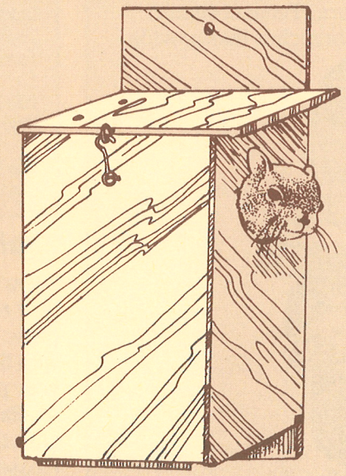
1. Drill holes at the top and bottom of the back plate for lag screws.

2. In one side plate, drill a hole 7.6 cm (3") in diameter. Locate the bottom of the entrance 30 cm (11") above the floor. In the other side plate, drill at least two holes 0.6 cm (1/4") in diameter near the top to provide ventilation.

3. Cut 0.5 cm (1/4") off each corner of the floor to provide drainage.

4. Assemble the pieces, as shown. Note that the roof is not centred over the box, but that a lip extends out over the entrance hole to provide protection from rain. The door is hinged with nails at the bottom and the hook-and-eye assembly are attached at the top and side.

5. Put your nesting box at least two metres high up in a tree.*

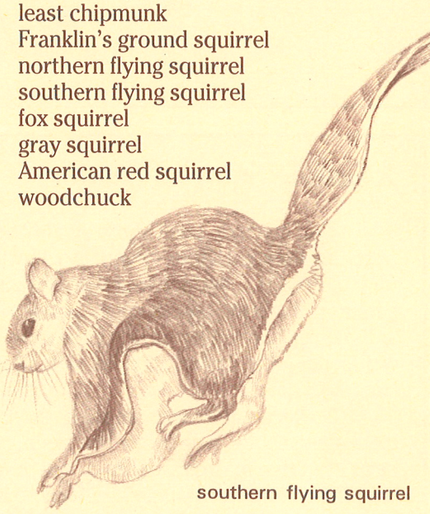


*Adapted with permission from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources' Community Wildlife Involvement Program Field Manual

Ontario Squirrels

Ontario is home to nine members of the squirrel family. Check a field guide to find out which ones live in your area.

eastern chipmunk
least chipmunk
Franklin's ground squirrel
northern flying squirrel
southern flying squirrel
fox squirrel
gray squirrel
American red squirrel
woodchuck



southern flying squirrel

What Big Teeth You Have . . .

Squirrels belong to a group of mammals called rodents, which also includes rats, mice, beavers and porcupines. All rodents have two pairs of large incisors that never stop growing. They are worn down by gnawing on hard objects. The front surfaces of the teeth are covered with hard enamel, but the backs are soft. When the squirrel is eating, the teeth wear down into a sharp, chisel-like shape that is perfect for biting off plants.