
For the Squirrels

One of my Extension memories was answering Harvey Cramer's question about why Marysville, Kansas had black squirrels and we never had any. As the farm truck topped the hill one-half mile south of his farm house a black squirrel scurried across the road in front of the truck. Quickest question I ever answered in Extension.

We have three kinds of squirrels in Southeast Nebraska. The most numerous would be the fox squirrel. The most common color is the reddish rust color, but they can also be silver-gray to black. Some town populations like Marysville and Battle Creek, Michigan are noted as black squirrel towns. Fox squirrels are 18-24 inches from nose to tail and weigh about two pounds when mature. They bear three to six young in February or March and sometimes have a second litter in July or early August. Fox squirrels do not hibernate, but do increase their time in the nest during colder weather. Their life span is from four to seven years.

Gray squirrels live in more thickly forested areas along the Missouri, Blue and in larger towns. They are typically gray with a buff underfur. They tend to be a little smaller than fox squirrels.

Flying squirrels are much smaller than fox or gray squirrels and have a membrane that extends from the wrist of the front leg to the ankle of the hind leg on each side of the squirrel. A horizontally flattened tail serves as a rudder during glides. Their fur is long and silky gray to brown on their backs and creamy white on their bellies. They have large eyes which helps night vision when they are quite active. Flying squirrels rarely cause the damage typical of squirrels and are fully protected in Nebraska. They usually live in colonies of twenty to forty squirrels.

All three species of squirrels eat acorns, nuts, seeds, fruits, berries, plant buds, flower blossoms, tree twigs, and tree bark. They have been known to eat insects, bird eggs, baby birds, mice and carrion. Squirrels are common prey for hawks, owls, snakes, and other predators. In Beatrice that would include frequent meals for the turkey vultures after falling prey to traffic.

Gray squirrels and fox squirrels are the most fascinating animals to watch and the most frustrating to deal with when they decide to gnaw on your home, car, garden or tree. It is not uncommon to have squirrels damage trees when food supplies are short. They can damage bird feeders, gnaw on home or vehicle wiring, gnaw entrance holes into attics, and eat the prize Impatiens flowers.

The three E's are approaches to deal with these problems. Exclude - A few ideas include screening wood attic vents or replacing them with metal, screen chimneys, and place wraps or tree guards around young trees to protect them. Evade - Cut tree branches at least ten feet back from the roof line and place squirrel guards on feeder, and utility poles. Give up and just feed the darn things. Eliminate - Trapping in live animal traps and shooting with firearms of bow are elimination methods, since they are a game species, notify Game and Parks of your problem and intended elimination method.

Paul C Hay, Extension Educator

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension in Gage County • 1115 West Scott Street, Beatrice NE 68310

(402) 223-1384 • FAX: (402) 223-1370 • email: phay1@unl.edu

