

Eastern Gray Squirrel

Squirrel hunting season runs from October - February in Alabama, thankfully it has ended. We have friends who take their gray squirrel hunting seriously. Last year, I was walking with the dogs when one of them, Ella, came running back out of the woods, a squirrel hanging from her mouth. Our hunter friend appeared, yelling for me to stop her and "Get it!" *It* being the squirrel.

Now, what kind of silly person is going to try and wrestle a bloody squirrel from a dog's mouth? Not I, thought I. But then pity and obstinacy got the better of me and I attempted. It *is* sad to see someone screaming for his squirrel.

I must admit, I was irritated too. Out for a peaceful walk and someone jumps out of the woods screaming. That someone is hunting beside the walking trail, a *no-no*.

So I'm thinking to myself, "Yeah, man I can make my dog mind and you can have your dog chewed squirrel back. See if I care. I won't let possibly rabies tainted blood stop me."

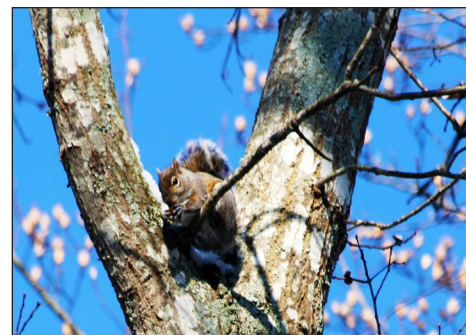
I tried demanding the squirrel of Ella. Didn't work. Sweet talk ; nothing. Just grabbing it was a non winner also.

Of course the effort was as unsuccessful as it was ridiculous. Fuming, I turned around and went back the way I had come, about a mile out of the way. I was making a point, after all.

Our hunter friend loves to tell his hunting exploits to his friends. Imagine my shock when I learned that one of his close pals had never heard this story. I was pleased to enlighten him. Even more pleased he found it so amusing he said he would have to mention it to hunter pal. It never occurred to me that hunter pal might not want this enchanting tale making the gossip rounds.



-Anita Smith



Squirrels are fun to watch; they can be ingenious at bird feeders. Here are some interesting facts about these guys.

Known to Migrate and Swim

Gray squirrels are known to mass migrate (can involve thousands of squirrels) when the population in an area can no longer be supported by forest stands. This is more likely in a year of mast failure, such as that caused by a late Spring freeze. Several of these migrations are recorded over the past 200 years. Amongst those noting the phenomenon were Meriwether Lewis and John Audubon. The squirrels will swim rivers and lakes in this effort. Many squirrels do not survive migration. On average, it takes 5 years for a population to recover. Recent migrations occurred in 1998 in Arkansas and 2004 in Kentucky.

Vulnerable

It is possible for squirrel numbers to

be depleted if high hunting pressure and scarce food resources combine. Very vulnerable to poor mast crop.

Breeding and Mortality

Two major breeding periods. Winter and Spring. 44 days gestation. Squirrels born in Summer will likely stay with mother until December. Mother squirrels will leave earlier litters at around 8 - 14 weeks.

Mortality rate in 1st year around 60%.

Possible to live 6 years or longer in wild.

Nests and Hollows

Use tree hollows in cooler months and leaf nests in warmer months. Young practice nest building. Leaf nests are well constructed.

Diet

Recover 80 - 90% of cached nuts. Can locate beneath a foot of snow.

Eat turtle shells, bones and deer antlers for calcium. Can eat Amanita mushrooms which are fatal to humans.

The Western gray squirrel in Washington is an imperiled species. *The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service considers the western gray squirrel a "species of concern" in western Washington, and the U.S. Forest Service recognizes it as a "sensitive" species and a "management indicator species" for oak-pine communities.* Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife

