

Eastern Gray Squirrel

(*Sciurus carolinensis*)



Among the members of the Squirrel Family living in Missouri, the Eastern gray and fox squirrels are the most common. Their common names are descriptive of the general coat color—the grayish of one, and the “reddish fox” coloration of the other.

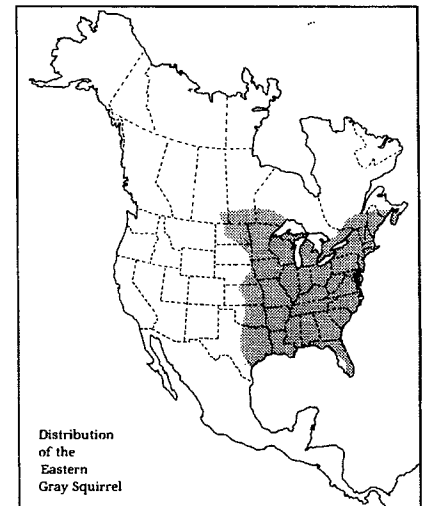
Description. The gray squirrel varies in length from 14-21 inches (355-533 mm) and in weight from 3/4-1½ pounds (340-680 g); the fox squirrel is generally larger, having a length from 19-29 inches (482-736 mm) and a weight from 1-3 pounds (453-1,360 g).

Distribution and abundance. Both of these rodents occur throughout Missouri, but the gray squirrel is more abundant in the Ozark and Mississippi lowland regions, while the fox squirrel is more common in the northern and western prairies.

Habitat and home. These squirrels occupy the same general habitat,

primarily a mixed hardwood association with oak and hickory trees predominating. The grays are more common in the smaller bottomlands and the “foxes” along the higher ridges. In the prairie regions of the state, fox squirrels are found along the few remaining Osage orange hedge fences, in farm woodlots, along timbered fence rows and in timbered draws. Both species also live in urban areas, especially where large oak and hickory trees are common.

A squirrel’s home is a leafy nest located in a cavity or fork of a tree. Cavities suitable for squirrel nests occur most often in older trees, particularly white oaks, elms, sycamores and soft maples. These are preferred home sites, especially for winter and for nurseries, because they provide good protection from weather and enemies. Leaf nests are usually built in the tops of large trees and consist of a rough twig framework with a bulky pile of leaves heaped layer upon layer. The squirrel hollows out a nest cavity in the center of the leaves.



Missouri Mammals

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This series is abstracted from the revised edition of *The Wild Mammals of Missouri* by Charles and Elizabeth Schwartz. For more detailed information about this species and other mammals in Missouri, refer to this book. Your school library may have it or can borrow it for you from the inter-library loan service. This book can be purchased from the University of Missouri Press, P.O. Box 1644, Columbia, MO 65211, or the Missouri Department of Conservation, P.O. Box 180, Jefferson City, MO 65102.

Fox Squirrel

(*Sciurus niger*)

Habits. In general, these two species live most of their lives in the vicinity of a particular tree and seldom travel farther than 200 yards (183 m) from home in any one season.

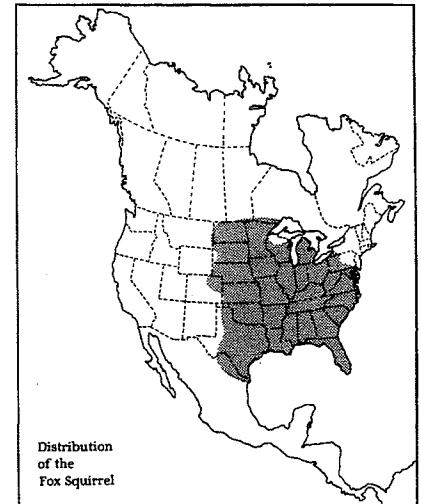
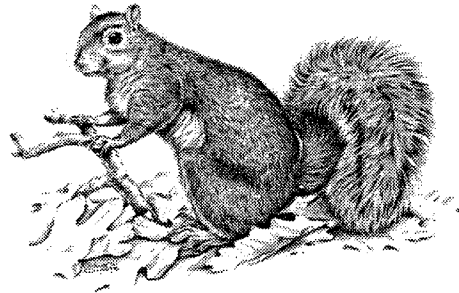
In any patch of woods or forest, squirrels live in loose colonies. All the members of one colony recognize each other and are familiar with all the nest sites and food sources in the area.

Gray squirrels are early risers and leave their nests with the first light of day. They are most active about sunrise and shortly thereafter, and again in late afternoon. Most of the day they stay in their nest or lie on a limb or other platform where they sleep and sun themselves. By comparison, fox squirrels come out later and retire earlier and are frequently more active in the middle of the day. Gray squirrels are more wary than fox squirrels and thus are regarded by most sportsmen as harder to hunt.

Foods. The foods of squirrels are varied; of 100 different species of plants eaten, only a few comprise the important staple sources. These are nuts; fruits and buds of hickory, pecan, walnut, elm and mulberry trees; and field corn.

The importance of acorn and nut crops is shown by the drastic fluctuations in squirrel numbers following years of good or bad mast production. These staple, winter foods have an important influence on the physical condition of the females which must produce next year's young.

Squirrels are notorious because of their habit of burying nuts in the ground. Stored nuts have no particular ownership, and the members of a squirrel community share each other's efforts. The general position



of stored food probably is located slightly by a sense of memory, but the actual position of individual nuts is found by a keen sense of smell. Many buried nuts are not recovered, and a large percentage of them sprout and eventually become trees.

Reproduction. The mating period for gray squirrels begins in late December or early January while fox squirrels tend to start breeding 10 days to two weeks earlier. Another general mating period occurs from late May to early July. Pregnancy requires about 45 days, and most litters are born in February or March, and July or August. One to eight young comprise a litter, but two or three are most common. The young are hairless at birth, have their eyes and ears closed, and possess well developed claws. They come out of the nest for the first time when 6 to 7 weeks old, and in another week or so are weaned.

Importance. From 1½ million to three million squirrels are taken annually in Missouri; at the rate of one pound of dressed meat per animal, squirrels furnish a large supply of meat each year for Missouri hunters. Squirrels provide considerable pleasure for city dwellers who observe them around their homes and in parks.

Management. Where it is desirable to increase squirrels, attempts should be made to improve their living conditions. Because middle-aged or mature trees are the most valuable source of food and cover for squirrels, these trees should be saved in any timber stand. If squirrels become obnoxious in attics, repellents such as naphthalene flakes or moth balls may be scattered around to discourage them. Live traps are effective in removing nuisance squirrels, but the animals should be moved at least 1-2 miles (1.6-3.2 km) from the site to keep them from returning.

