



SQUIRRELS living with wildlife

In an effort to coexist with wildlife, consider the enormous hardships these intelligent and fascinating wild species encounter because so much of their habitat has been destroyed. Each year they are forced into closer contact with humans and must compete with us for food, shelter and space. With a little understanding, patience and a few precautions and common sense steps, we can all enjoy the wonderfully interesting wild animals who share our backyards and cities.

Most squirrels are active during the day, beginning at dawn, often resting midday, and active again until dusk. Squirrels are most active during the fall, collecting and burying nuts and seeds and also looking for protective shelter from winter weather.

Habitat. Trees provide protection from the elements and predators, and also serve as a food source for squirrels. In urban areas, squirrels are able to use human-made structures for shelter, such as attics, sheds and eavestroughs.

Diet. Squirrels eat acorns as well as other nuts and seeds, flowers, buds, fruit and occasionally bird eggs and young/small birds. Squirrels normally have two litters per year with each litter consisting of one to seven young.

Reproduction. The first mating season is from December to January and birth occurs during February to April. A second mating may occur in the early summer and another litter may arrive during August or September. At seven-to-eight weeks of age the young leave the nest to forage with the mother.

Common questions:

Squirrels are in my attic. What should I do?

We encourage homeowners not to attempt exclusion methods during the months of March to October because the squirrel is most likely a mother with young inside the attic. If you hear noises coming from the attic during the night, it is more likely raccoons, which are nocturnal. If squirrels are living in your attic they will be noisy during the day. During the spring, summer and early fall, it is best to practice tolerance and have some patience with the situation. Young begin

leaving the den around seven to eight weeks of age and exclusion techniques should not be attempted before this time.

Deterrent methods that will disturb the squirrels and encourage them to move out:

- A battery-powered light shining towards the den at all times
- A battery-powered radio tuned to an all-talk station at a high volume placed near the den
- Visiting the attic several times a day (make noise and move things around)

NOTE: It may take a couple days to a week for the squirrels to move out, so please be patient. Try to remember that the squirrel needs to find a new home and relocate all her young. As you can imagine, this may take some time and you may need to be persistent in using the deterrent techniques for a week or more.

To determine if the squirrels are gone:

- Tack a plastic bag over the entrance/exit hole
- If, after three days, the plastic has not been ripped down you can permanently seal the hole using sheet metal or heavy hardware cloth (chicken wire is not effective in excluding squirrels from attics)
- If the plastic has been ripped down continue with the deterrent techniques and recheck after several days

If you notice a squirrel frantically trying to regain access to the attic, young may be trapped inside and you should immediately re-open the entry. The mother can cause major damage to the house while trying to get to her young. If you permanently seal the hole with young trapped inside they will endure an inhumane death, and this will, ultimately, create more problems for the homeowner.

Squirrels are in my chimney. What should I do? NEVER SMOKE SQUIRRELS OUT OF A CHIMNEY

If a squirrel is trapped in your chimney:

- A thick rope or a knotted sheet can be lowered down the chimney so the squirrel can climb out.
- If that is not an option you may follow the steps outlined below as an alternative. However, these steps should only be attempted if the exit is clearly visible for the squirrel and leads DIRECTLY outside.

Open a door or window leading directly outside and close all other doors and windows

- Turn off the lights
- Open the damper so the squirrel can access the hearth
- The squirrel will be attracted to the natural light and fresh air from the open door/window
- Leave the room and the squirrel will leave on its own
- Seeds or nuts placed near the exit will attract the squirrel towards the exit

When using either of these methods, once the squirrel is free, cap your chimney with a heavy steel mesh or a heavy-duty chimney cap purchased from a hardware store.

If you cannot assist the squirrel in either of the ways outlined above, please call your local Ontario SPCA Branch, affiliated Humane Society or a licensed wildlife rehabilitator for further advice.

What can I do to stop squirrels eating birdseed from my feeder?

Special birdhouses can be purchased that exclude squirrels and large birds from feeding. Bafflers can also be purchased which prevent squirrels from climbing the pole to the feeder. Place bird feeders about eight feet away from any tree branches so that squirrels are unable to leap from a branch to the feeder.

What can I do to stop squirrels eating bulbs from my garden?

Blend bloodmeal into the soil around the bulbs to deter squirrels from digging and eating the bulbs. Plant covers are also effective against squirrel damage to bulbs. A diluted solution of hot sauce (one tablespoon hot sauce to one gallon water) misted on the soil and bulbs is another effective deterrent.