

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Soil Conservation Service
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SQUIRREL MANAGEMENT GUIDE



Two species of squirrels occur in Oklahoma. The southern gray squirrel is present mainly in the more mature hardwoods and hardwood-pine woodlands in the eastern one-third of the state. The fox squirrel is present statewide where suitable wooded areas exist. Road kills and visual sightings indicate that the fox squirrel will venture a considerable distance from woody vegetation while foraging.

Squirrels can be successfully hunted with a .22 caliber rifle. In some situations a shotgun may be a safer firearm to use. Still-hunting is practiced by some while others like to use a squirrel dog. Other reasons for having squirrels present are for picture taking or just observing their interesting antics.

HABITAT:

Squirrel populations vary in direct relation to the quality of the habitat. Two squirrels per acre after the breeding season is considered a high population. The animals are dependent on adequate numbers of den trees for the raising of young, particularly during the unpredictable late winter season. Mature hardwood trees, particularly the oaks, usually provide the best den trees and also the bulk of the annual

food supply. While leaf nests are sometimes used in absence of den trees, the animals, both young and old, are vulnerable to wind, nest shooters, freezing weather, and predation.

Most moisture requirements are obtained from succulent fruits, buds, and insects. However, during periods of extremely dry weather, water could be an important factor.

FOOD REQUIREMENTS:

Food habits vary due to the variation and dispersal of plant species throughout the state. Squirrels in eastern sections utilize parts of indigenous plant species such as beech, cherry, osageorange, flowering dogwood, blackgum, sweetgum, hickory, pine, blackberry, huckleberry, maple, oaks, walnut, and ash. The animals in western sections utilize species such as cottonwood buds, elm, mulberry, osageorange, oaks, pecan, ash, and arborvitae. Both species of squirrels utilize foods such as buds, fungi, roots and tubers, nestling birds, bird eggs, and insects. Field crops such as corn, peanuts, soybeans, and sorghums are readily taken. Where hickory, pecan, and osageorange are available, they are choice foods.

The existence of a wide variety and dispersion of woody plants usually promotes an adequate food supply. It is unusual, during unfavorable climatic conditions, that all species fail to produce a food crop.

BREEDING:

Adult females usually produce two litters of young per year when habitat conditions are favorable. A good breeding season usually follows a bountiful food crop. One litter is usually produced in late winter and the other in late summer. Either of the litters may be skipped due to poor habitat conditions. The litter size varies, but usually averages about three young.

A parasitic botfly, Cuterebra sp., deposits eggs under the skin of small animals such as field mice, squirrel, and rabbits. Sometimes eggs are deposited in or near the scrotum. The developing larvae destroys some tissue before it finally departs the host. A scar usually remains and one or more of the testicles is absent. This causes many people to think that the animal had been emasculated by adult males.

LAND MANAGEMENT:

The removal of den and mast trees with any type of land management is always detrimental to squirrels. Clear cutting and widespread hardwood removal by mechanical or chemical means are practices that practically eliminate squirrels from large areas.

There are several management practices that may be applied to improve habitat for squirrels. Den boxes may be installed at the rate of one or two per acre in the absence of adequate den trees. These may be constructed from sections of hollow logs, rough lumber, sawmill slabs or old automobile tires. Den boxes should be placed in trees that are some distance from public roads and other public use areas. They should be as inconspicuous as possible. The boxes should be placed more than 15 feet from the ground. When managing woodlands for commercial wood products, a minimum of four to five den and food-producing trees per acre should remain on the land. Food production per tree can be substantially increased on mast-producing trees by careful thinning to reduce competition for moisture and sunlight. Oaks, pecans, hickories, mulberries, and osage orange should be given special consideration.

Special plantings can be made to increase the food supply where soils are suitable. These could include mulberry, osage orange, sawtooth oak, northern red oak, pecan, and walnut. A much quicker food supply could be provided by plantings of field crops such as corn, sorghums, soybeans, sunflower, and peanuts near wooded areas.

In urban areas the fox squirrel may become a nuisance. These animals are fully protected from hunting and perhaps natural predators are not present. This coupled with a supplemental food supply from bird feeders permits quite high populations to build up. Urban areas are usually void of natural dens--this necessitates alternative denning sites which usually include attics of homes. With the help of woodpeckers, they also cut holes in wooden shingle roofs. At least a partial control is to live-trap the problem individuals and release them in rural areas with suitable habitat.

Squirrels are the second most hunted animal in Oklahoma. The seasons are long and opportunities for hunting are good, especially in pecan orchards. The meat is palatable and has been used by rural people for many years as a supplement to their meat diet. Harvest of surplus squirrels for recreation and food is good management. These animals respond well to management. Habitat should be maintained, improved, or established to perpetuate this wildlife resource.