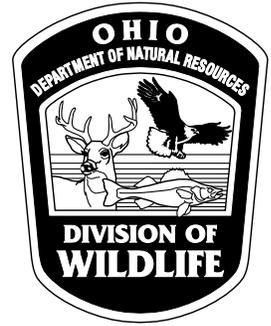


Gray Squirrel

Scientific Name: *Sciurus carolinensis carolinensis*
Sciurus carolinensis pennsylvanicus



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Introduction

The gray squirrel was one of the most populous species of wildlife in Ohio at the time of settlement. Gray squirrels had extensive habitat in the state taking advantage of the widespread forests in Ohio. Early historical records speak of gray squirrel populations so dense that "...it took a month for an army of squirrels to pass." In fact, gray squirrels disrupted early agricultural efforts in the state to such an extent that Ohio law required each taxpayer to turn in a quota of squirrel skins along with his tax payment. But as the human population grew and more land was cleared, and elimination practices continued, gray squirrel numbers began to dwindle. By 1885, hunting laws were enacted restricting the hunting seasons and bag limits for the gray squirrel.

The gray squirrel is one of four squirrel species in Ohio; fox, red, and flying squirrels are the other three. There are six subspecies of gray squirrels in the United States; two of them *S. c. carolinensis* and *S. c. pennsylvanicus* reside in Ohio.

Gray squirrels are found from the Atlantic Coast to central Montana and Texas, and in southern Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan, Canada. In Ohio it is found in all 88 counties, although numbers are significantly higher in the southeastern and south-central portion of the state and less in the western and northeast.

Description

As its name indicates, the gray squirrel is predominately gray in color. These gray hairs may have orange tips that will give the animal a reddish cast. Its belly is more of a grayish-white or a rusty color. Many gray squirrels have a white trim on the back of the ears and a straw-colored ring around their eyes.

Habitat and Habits

Gray squirrels prefer large expanses of wooded areas of hardwood trees. Timber management practices that create stands of middle-aged and mature trees provide the squirrel the most food and den sites. As such, most of Ohio's gray squirrel population is found in the unglaciated Hill Country of southeastern Ohio. But many are also found in the state's cities in neighborhoods and parks with large trees. Oak, hickory, beech, walnut, buckeye, tuliptree, maple, sassafras, and flowering dogwood are the trees that are found in the gray squirrel's preferred habitat.

Gray squirrels will take shelter in leaf nests they have constructed or in tree dens. Leaf nests are made of twigs, leaves, and sometimes grasses and scraps of paper and cloth. They are usually one to two feet in diameter with an interior cavity of four to five inches. The mass of leaves at the top of older trees in your backyard that is revealed in the fall when trees are bare is a squirrel nest. Gray squirrels are more social than their fox and red cousins; several

gray squirrels may share a shelter nest. Dens are about 20 feet above the ground, in a hollow trunk or limb that is at least 15 inches in diameter. Den entrances are three to four inches wide. Cavities are lined with leaves.

Gray squirrels do not hibernate in the winter; if there is heavy snow cover and/or frigid temperatures, the squirrels will take cover in their den for an extended period of time. However to make it through the winter the gray squirrel must get out and find food. Much of that winter food is the acorns and other nuts the squirrels buried during the year. Retrieving them is not a function of memory, but smell. Many of the nuts buried are never recovered and contribute to maintenance of woodlands.

Reproduction and Care of the Young

Gray squirrels running up and down and around trees is thought to be a part of the courtship ritual. Gray squirrels are polygamous meaning the male mates with more than one female. The male will have no role in rearing the young. Young squirrels are reared in leaf nests, dens, and occasionally bird houses. When they are born, the young have no teeth or fur, and their eyes and ears are tightly shut. Young squirrels are slow maturing--their eyes won't open for about 36 days, it will be nearly seven weeks before they begin to sample solid

foods like greens and bark, and approximately 10 weeks before they venture out of the nest onto the ground. At between 14 and 15 weeks gray squirrels are mature enough to venture out and live independently; however, it is not unusual for litters to stay together for close to nine months. Gray squirrels are capable of reproducing within months after their own birth; males reach breeding age at nine to eleven months and females at six to eight months.

Gray squirrels are quite vocal. A bark is the most familiar sound they make. Buzzing, wailing, squealing, trills, squeaks, and purrs are other common squirrel sounds. Many people are familiar with the constant stream of chatter among squirrels in backyard trees.

Management Plans

The Ohio Division of Wildlife doesn't manage habitat specifically for gray squirrels. However, gray squirrels can be found throughout the state and at many of our state wildlife areas where suitable habitat exists. The management activities that occur on these areas and elsewhere around the state are designed to benefit gray squirrels and a host of other wildlife species. Each year wildlife biologists evaluate data and establish hunting season dates and bag limits for gray squirrels.



Viewing Opportunities

Gray squirrels are found throughout Ohio. The best chances of seeing them are in areas of mature hardwood forests or in city parks and backyards with mature trees. Seven of Ohio's officially designated "Watchable Wildlife" areas are good places to see the gray squirrel: Blacklick Woods Metro Park, Mohican-Memorial, Hocking, Tar Hollow, Scioto Trail, and Shawnee state forests, and Deer Creek and Waterloo wildlife areas.

Do Something Wild!

The Division of Wildlife manages for wildlife diversity in the state. We attempt to create and/or conserve the habitat that will support as wide a diversity of wildlife as possible. Many species like the gray squirrel are hunted in the state, but many more are not. The Division has a special program to manage and research nongame species that is supported by the generous citizens of the state of Ohio. With money either donated through the state income tax checkoff, by the purchase of wildlife license plates, or direct contributions to the Endangered Species Special Account, the Division is able to purchase critical habitat that is essential to sustaining many species of wildlife and to implement special efforts like the reintroduction of the osprey and the trumpeter swan to the state.

Contributions to our Wildlife Diversity Program are accepted throughout the year. To make a donation, please send a check to: Endangered Species Special Account, Ohio Division of Wildlife, 2045 Morse Road, Bldg. G, Columbus, Ohio 43229-6693. All contributions, whether made on your income tax return or directly, are tax deductible.

At a Glance

Mating: Polygamous

Peak Breeding Activity: At two periods of the year--December-January and May-June

Gestation: 44 days

Young are Born: February-March and July-August

Litter Size: 2 or 3

Young Leave Parents: At 14-15 weeks

Number of Litters per Year: 1 or 2

Adult Weight: 12-24 ounces

Adult Length: 8-10 inches; the tail is 7.8-10 inches

Life Expectancy: 1 year average; 10 years maximum

Migration Patterns: Year-round resident

Typical Foods: Nuts, seeds, and fruits of hickory, beech, oak, black walnut, tuliptree, sugar maple, flowering dogwood, buckeye, wild grape, pawpaw, persimmon, butternut, and black cherry; also insects.

Native to Ohio: Yes

