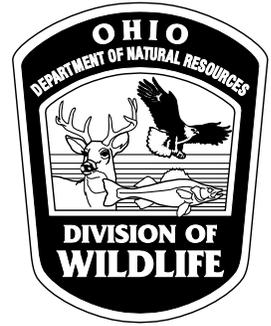


Ohio Division of Wildlife
Life History Notes
Fox Squirrel

Scientific Name: *Sciurus niger*



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Introduction

The fox squirrel is one of four squirrel species in Ohio; gray, red, and flying squirrels are the other three. Of the four, the fox squirrel is the largest. Fox squirrels were not originally inhabitants of Ohio. The extensive, heavily wooded forest of pre-settlement Ohio was not their preferred habitat. Only when settlement cleared some of the dense woods away and provided open areas and fewer dense woodlots did the fox squirrel start to make Ohio home, moving into the area from the geographical Midwest prairie edge.

The range of the fox squirrel in the United States is quite similar to that of the gray squirrel. Fox squirrels inhabit the southern Atlantic Coast west into the Plains states. Fox squirrels are not found in the New England states or southern Canada.

Description

The fox squirrel is much more orange in appearance than the gray squirrel with which it is sometimes confused. Its body is a yellowish-gray with reddish-yellow cheeks, face, and feet. The belly is pale yellow to orange in color. Tufts behind the ears and the tips of its tail are yellowish-brown. The tail itself is a reddish-orange with a mixture of dark gray or black hairs throughout.

Habitat and Habits

The primary range of the fox squirrel is in the woodlot country of agricultural western Ohio. These woodlots are 10 to 20 acres in size with a sparse understory and separated from one

another by large acreages of agricultural croplands. Fox squirrels make use of hickory, oak, beech, black walnut, maple, elm, and buckeye trees for food and shelter. Timber management practices that create broken stands of middle-aged and mature trees provide the needed den and food sites for fox squirrels.

Like gray squirrels, fox squirrels use two types of nests: leaf and den. Leaf nests are constructed from leaves and twigs and are located in the crotches of tree branches. Dens are formed in hollow tree trunks or branches. Nests are used for shelter and rearing young.

Fox squirrels do not hibernate in the winter, but keep their outside activities to a minimum in extremely cold weather. As with the gray squirrel, much of the fox squirrel's winter diet is the nuts it buried earlier in the year. Retrieving them is not a function of memory, but smell. Many of the nuts buried are never recovered and contribute to maintenance and renewal of woodlands.

Mature fox squirrels' diet consists of nuts, fruits, seeds, and insects and varies with the seasons and availability.

Fox squirrels are also quite vocal. They communicate with a variety of sounds that include chattering, barking, and squealing.

Reproduction and Care of the Young

Male fox squirrels initiate the chase of the female that leads to mating. Fox squirrels are polygamous, meaning the male will mate with more than one female. The male will play no



role in rearing the young. Female fox squirrels carry the young for about a month and a half (44 days). The young are born blind and will rely on their mother's milk for at least the first five weeks of life--this could be significantly longer as young fox squirrels generally don't leave the nest to forage on the ground until they are about three months old.

Management Plans

The Ohio Division of Wildlife doesn't manage habitat specifically for fox squirrels. However fox squirrels are found in varying numbers 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 fox squirrels and a host of other wildlife species. Each year wildlife biologists evaluate data and establish hunting season dates and bag limits for fox squirrels.

Viewing Opportunities

Fox squirrels are found around Ohio. The best chance to see them are in areas with sparse woodlands interspersed with croplands. Eight of Ohio's officially designated "Watchable Wildlife" areas are good places to see fox squirrels: Walden Waterfowl Refuge, Deer Creek, Spencer Lake, Big Island, Killbuck Marsh, and Funk Bottoms wildlife areas, Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, and North Chagrin Reservation.

Do Something Wild!

The Division of Wildlife manages for wildlife diversity in the state. We attempt to create and/or conserve the habitats that will support as wide a diversity of wildlife as possible. Many species like the fox squirrel are hunted in the state, but many more are not. The Division has a special program to manage and research non-game 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, 1840 Belcher Drive, Columbus, Ohio 43224-1329. All contributions, whether made on your income tax return or directly, are deductible.

At a Glance

Mating: Polygamous

Peak Breeding Activity: At two periods of the year--December-February and May-July

Gestation: 44 days

Young are Born: February-April and June-August

Litter Size: 2-5, 3 young is average

Young Leave Parents: 14-15 weeks

Number of Litters per Year: 1 or 2; multiple litters are usually produced by females 2 years old

Adult Weight: 19.2-48 ounces

Adult Length: 10-15 inches; the tail is 9-14 inches

Life Expectancy: 1 year is average

Migration Patterns: Year-round residents

Typical foods: Nuts of hickory, oak, and beech; fruits of blackberry, dogwood, wild cherry, and wild grape; corn; buds of maple, elm, and willow; and insects

Native to Ohio: No

