

# Eastern Gray Squirrels

*(Sciurus carolinensis)*

Understanding the habits and habitats of wildlife, and taking appropriate measures to prevent unwanted encounters, will help everyone to continue to enjoy the wonderful wild resources that still exist in New Jersey.

## Getting to Know Eastern Gray Squirrels

The most common type of squirrel in this area is the Eastern gray squirrel. Gray squirrels are diurnal, or active during the day, with peaks of activity in early morning and late afternoon. Squirrels build large nests of leaves and twigs on tree branches. They also den within tree cavities and in buildings where they can gain access through open spaces in the roof, attic, or walls.

Although they do not hibernate, squirrels often remain in their nests in cold or stormy weather, venturing out when they need to find food, which they have often cached near their nests.

Squirrels are omnivorous. They eat seeds, nuts, fruit, tree bark and buds, eggs, and fungi. Like other rodents, squirrels are accomplished gnawers, using their sharp, ever-growing front teeth to strip bark and chew through wood and plastic.

Breeding season begins in late winter. Depending on conditions and food availability, squirrels may produce two litters a year. Average litter size is three young, born naked and blind. Young squirrels remain in the nest for about six weeks.

Squirrels are opportunistic, making use of all sources of food and shelter available to them. They can also cause property damage, such as gnawing through electrical wiring when they nest inside walls or attics or overturning bird feeders. The best way to discourage them is to modify their habitat.

### Here are some ideas:

- **Do not feed them.** Do not offer squirrels food. Discourage them from raiding bird feeding stations by placing feeders at least six feet away from fences, trees, and buildings or by using squirrel baffles. Do not use capsaicin based hot pepper powder; this powder can make squirrels sick and can irritate birds' eyes.
- **Allow them to find their way out of buildings.** Occasionally, squirrels enter buildings through open doors, windows, or chimneys. If a squirrel is loose, determine its location and close surrounding interior doors. Keeping one window or door open, leave the room, allowing the squirrel to find its way out.
- **Keep your house in good repair.** Squirrels, especially adult females, seek out openings for potential den sites. A house in poor repair is an open invitation to them. Gnawing through wood to create larger holes, squirrels gain entry through even small spaces. If you suspect that a squirrel has taken up residence in a wall or attic space, look for likely entries and listen for tell-tale sounds of scampering.

From March through September, assume that there are juveniles in the nest. Wait until the young are old enough to leave on their own. Once you are sure that there are no more young, you can begin the process of closing the squirrels out of the space by frightening them away with loud noises or by waiting until they have gone outside on their own during the day. If you have any doubts about whether all the animals are gone, you can leave one hole open and fit it with a one-way door, similar to a cat door, with a hinged flap so that the squirrels can escape but not re-enter.

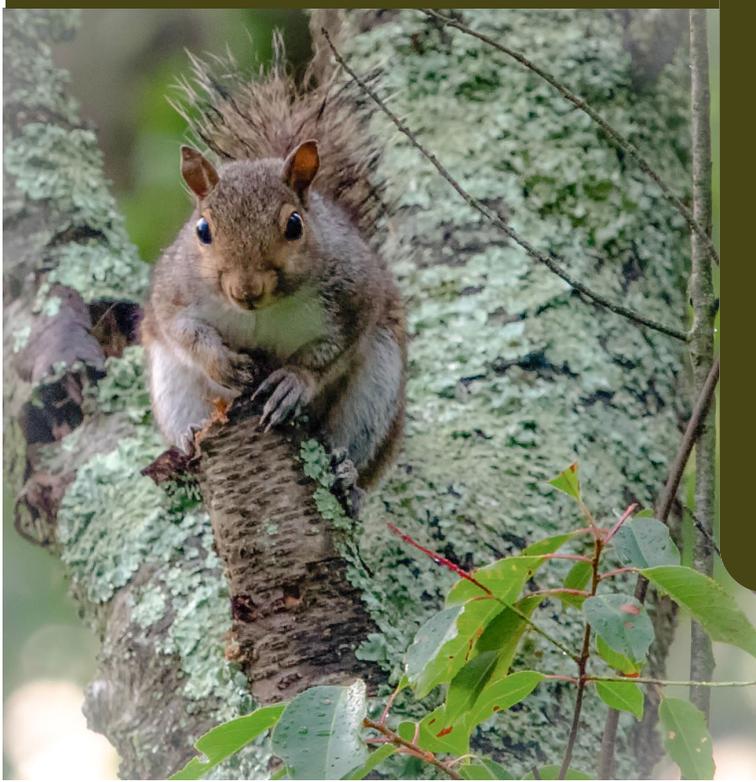
## About Mercer County Wildlife Center

The Mercer County Wildlife Center is a state and federally licensed facility that cares for injured, ill and displaced wildlife. The Center provides these animals with the medical treatment and a temporary refuge before releasing them back into an appropriate wild habitat.

For more information regarding the work we do and the animals who share our environment, including a series of printable brochures that provide tips for coexisting peacefully with those animals, visit us online at:

[www.mercercounty.org/departments/mercercounty-park-commission/wildlife-center](http://www.mercercounty.org/departments/mercercounty-park-commission/wildlife-center)

For information on protecting bee hives and livestock, contact the Division of Fish and Wildlife Wildlife Control Unit at (908) 735-8793.

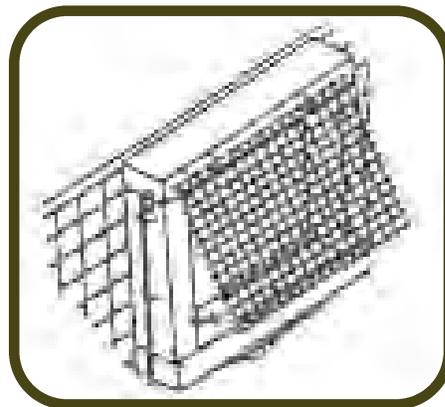


Leave this door in place for several days, continue to listen for activity, and, if possible, inspect the space until you are certain they are gone. Then, seal all openings with 1/2" hardware cloth or metal flashing, being sure to extend these over the hole at least 6" in all directions to prevent squirrels from gnawing through the patch.

- **Deter future visits.** To prevent future problems, squirrel-proof the building permanently by repairing or replacing loose or rotting siding, boards, and shingles. Trim tree branches away from the side and top of buildings to prevent easy access to the eaves and roof.
- **Protect trees and plants.** To prevent squirrels from stripping bark or otherwise damaging trees, wrap a 24" metal cylinder at least 6 feet up the tree trunk and trim lower branches. Occasionally, squirrels dig up bulbs; to protect these, place chicken wire over the soil where they are planted.



Nimble and opportunistic,  
squirrels are always on  
the lookout for a free buffet



One-Way Door



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Dan Benson, *County Executive*

The Mercer County Wildlife Center is owned by Mercer County and operated by the Mercer County Park Commission with the support and assistance of Wildlife Center Friends.

Wildlife Center Friends is a 501(C)(3) non-profit organization formed to support the activities of the Mercer County Wildlife Center. • [www.wildlifecenterfriends.org](http://www.wildlifecenterfriends.org)