

Squirrels

Squirrels are small mammals in the class known as rodents. There are hundreds of species of squirrels that are divided into seven groups. They come in a variety of sizes and colors. Two types - tree squirrels and ground squirrels - are found throughout most of the United States, especially in forests. Of these types, fox squirrels and gray squirrels are the most well-known species. These animals depend on trees, often oak trees, for shelter and a place to raise their young. They also hide from predators in trees, and acorns from oak trees are a big part of a squirrel's diet. Squirrels also eat leaves, fruit and plant buds, and they may also eat bird seed from bird feeders. Occasionally, squirrels eat bird eggs and even other small animals, though they usually only do this when no other food is available.

Gray squirrels, the most well-known tree squirrels in North America, are about fifteen inches long on average. They are one of only a few species of wild animals that have learned how to live with people. Squirrels are often found helping themselves to people's vegetable gardens. They may also find shelter in the crawl spaces and attics of people's homes. Because of this, many people consider squirrels to be pests, but they are also fascinating and fun to watch.

Squirrels are most active in the late winter, the time of year when they mate. Baby squirrels are born in late spring. They are born about an inch long and weigh about an ounce. Newborn squirrels have no hair or teeth, and they cannot see until they are about six to eight weeks old. In summer months, you are most likely to see squirrels in the early morning hours. They are amazing acrobats, able to climb straight up and down trees and do high-wire walks on electrical wires and telephone lines. Most adult squirrels live alone, but when it is very cold, they sometimes share nests with other squirrels for warmth.

A squirrel's teeth never stop growing. They chew on tree branches to keep their teeth trimmed and sharp. Some have been known to chew on electrical cords for the same reason, and squirrels have caused many power outages because of this. Squirrels communicate with each other by making chirping sounds. They also make gestures with their tails to communicate. When they sense danger, squirrels freeze and stay extremely still. You have probably seen a squirrel do this when you approach it.

Name _____

Date _____

Squirrels Answers

1. d
2. d
3. c
4. They help themselves to people's vegetable gardens; they find shelter in the crawl spaces and attics of people's homes.
5. b
6. c
7. c
8. a
9. They make chirping sounds; they make gestures with their tails.
10. D