

# AT HOME in the Forest

ADAPTED FROM:

**Bridges to the Natural World**  
New Jersey Audubon Society  
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GOAL:

**To learn that animals meet their needs  
by living in specific habitat types.**



## 1 Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- understand that animals need food, water, shelter, and a space to live,
- observe that animals live in a certain place because they can find the things they need,
- discover that animals help spread seeds.

### CORRELATION TO NJCCCS:

The correlations in this publication were done prior to 2002 utilizing the older standards from 1994.

### LANGUAGE ARTS:

3.2 (1,2,3,4,7) 3.5 (1,4,5,6,8)

### MATHEMATICS: 4.1(3,8)

**SCIENCE:** 5.1(16),5.2(2,4,5),  
5.5(3,4,5,7),5.6(2-6)  
5.7(1,3,4,7,8)

## Subject Areas

Science, Language Arts, Mathematics.

## Duration

45 minutes to one hour..

## Setting

Indoors or outdoors.

*Ideally, this activity will be conducted outdoors where students can actually "see" and observe squirrels in action.*

## Skills

Communicating, using time and space, observing, classifying, inferring, predicting, interpreting data.

## Charting the Course

Squirrels are probably the most commonly seen species of wildlife that young children can relate to and understand. By using squirrels as an example of wildlife, students can easily relate how the basic needs of squirrels can be applied to all wildlife.

## Vocabulary

habitat, niche.

## 2 Background Information

Ocean County is home to three native squirrel species: gray squirrel, red squirrel, and flying squirrel. Red squirrels are small animals usually found living in pine forests. They are diurnal, but are particularly active at dawn and dusk. Flying squirrels, being strictly nocturnal, are rarely seen. Of the three, the largest and most commonly seen is the gray squirrel.

Gray squirrels do not hibernate. Much of their winter food comes from nuts and seeds they have buried or cached between late summer and autumn when food supplies are abundant. In the process, different things may happen: (a) nuts and seeds may become food for animals other than squirrels, either immediately or during the winter months, (b) food not found by the squirrel or another animal may germinate in the spring, or (c) food items may decay, releasing nutrients into the soil. Regardless of what happens, the squirrel, in its need to find and store food for itself, plays a special role within its habitat. This role is the squirrel's niche. Although the gray squirrel is not the only gatherer and spreader of seeds in Ocean County, it is an important one. Loss of great numbers of these animals would alter the way seeds and nuts from certain plants (oaks, hickories, and pines) are dispersed.

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### Materials

- crayons
- squirrel "signs" (easily found on most school sites or home yards.)
- squirrel pictures or taxidermied specimen

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### Preparation

- Gather materials for exhibit.
- If foul weather, walk may be done around building.

## THE ACTIVITY

- Have students explore the exhibit
- Settle students by squirrel area
- Ask students about squirrel knowledge:
  - Have you ever seen this animal?
  - What is its name?
  - Where did you see it?
  - Have you ever seen one eating?
  - What food does it like?
  - What kind of food do you like?
  - Describe your home.
  - What kind of home does it have?

- Read or tell a story about squirrels, such as *"The Squirrel Who Forgot."*

- Ask these questions before the walk

*Where did Sandy store her acorns and seeds?(nest in oak tree and in the ground)*

*Which place is better? Why?*

(If they are stored in the tree, the Blue Jay might take them. If they are stored in the ground they could be overlooked. There is a risk in both places.)

*How would you answer Sandy Squirrel's question, "Where do trees come from?"*

(Sometimes animals bury seeds and nuts and forget about them. When spring comes, they grow.)

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### Procedure

- Distribute one squirrel sign and one crayon to each student.
- Explain that during the nature walk they will be looking for signs of squirrels. Each time a sign is found the student will fill in one box next to the appropriate symbol. Let the students discover what some squirrel signs are before you tell them.
- "Let's see if Sandy or one of her relatives is outside today."



## 6

### Discussion

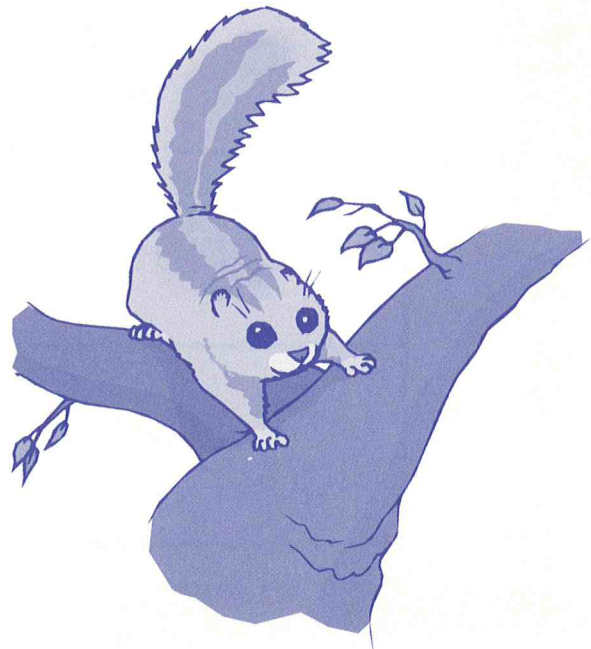
- Why did we go outside to look for a squirrel? (Wild animals needs are best met there)
- Did we see any live squirrels? What were they doing? or Why didn't we see any? (Perhaps one or more of the needs is not met: food, water, shelter, space)
- What kinds of food did we find that squirrels would eat? (nuts, bread, seeds, pine cones, berries, leaves)
- We looked at some trees today. How may have they been planted? (Animals bury seeds or nuts, people plant them).
- What are some things that could happen to a nut buried by a squirrel? (It may grow into a new plant; other animals may eat it)
- What places did we find where squirrels could have their homes? (holes in trees, leaf nests in trees)
- Is the area that we explored a place where squirrels would live? Why or why not? (Are needs met: food, water, shelter, and space)

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### Extension

IN THE SCHOOLYARD: Take a bag of peanuts that are still in their shells to the area where the Gray Squirrel was seen. Scatter the nuts and watch what the squirrel does. If there is a school lawn, peanuts could be scattered and watched to see what other animals might gather them. Do not try to feed any wild animal by hand.

Do this activity with other animals. Make a bulletin board of the signs and the habitat where each animal lives. (pigeon, crow, worm, sparrow)



# Squirrel Signs



Homes					
Food					
Footprints					
Live Squirrels					

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## The Squirrel Song (Author Unknown)

The musical notation consists of four staves, each with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The notes are quarter notes, and the lyrics are written below the notes. The first staff has the lyrics: "Gray squirrel Gray squirrel swish your bush - y tail". The second staff has the lyrics: "Gray squirrel Gray squirrel swish your bush - y tail". The third staff has the lyrics: "Put a nut between your toes Wrinkle up your little nose". The fourth staff has the lyrics: "Gray squirrel Gray squirrel swish your bush - y tail".

(Hand motions can be used to involve the students during the singing of the song.)

1. "Let's make ourselves look like a squirrel sitting on a branch." (Stoop slightly and put one hand at a time in front of your body so that you look like a squirrel in a sitting position with paws out in front of body.)
2. Make the squirrel swish its tail. (Move backside back and forth.)
3. "How would the squirrel hold a nut in its paws?" (Hold hands together pretending to hold nut, then stand up and wrinkle your nose.)
4. Go back to the beginning.

RED SQUIRREL: *Tamiasciurus budsonicus*.  
Has a habit of sitting on a tree limb and “scolding.”  
Feeds on acorns or oaks and seeds of pines,  
and nuts.



GRAY SQUIRREL: *Sciurus carolinensis*.  
Jumps from tree to tree.  
Feeds on ground stumps or logs,  
and nuts.