

# Controlling TREE SQUIRRELS in Urban Areas



**T**ree squirrels inhabit many parts of Texas. The three types of tree squirrels found in the state are the fox squirrel, the gray squirrel and the flying squirrel. Tree squirrels are interesting animals, but in urban and suburban areas they sometimes can be pests.

Fox squirrels, the most common of the tree squirrels, are found in east and central Texas. Gray squirrels, also known as "cat" squirrels, are found in the eastern part of Texas. Flying squirrels are the smallest of the tree squirrels, the least common, and the only nocturnal tree squirrel. They are found in the eastern part of the state.

Tree squirrels feed on a variety of material; nuts, fruit, seeds, berries, insects and bark make up the bulk of their diet. Nesting sites include tree cavities, old woodpecker holes, attics, etc. If such places cannot be found, tree squirrels will construct leafy nests in the branches of trees.

## **Damage**

Tree squirrels sometimes become pests in urban areas. They may eat pecans, fruits, berries, bird seed or vegetables in home gardens, or may nest in attics. Sounds of running or gnawing coming from the attic during the day often indicate the presence of squirrels. Running, squealing and gnawing sounds at night generally indicate the presence of rats. Squirrels can cause extensive damage to the insulation in the attic or walls, and

also may gnaw and damage electrical wiring. During winter, tree squirrels may damage trees and other ornamental plants by eating the bark off the limbs. Where squirrels are a problem, several things can be done to discourage them.

## **Control Methods**

### **Exclusion**

Making trees, attics and buildings squirrel-proof is a permanent solution to the problem, does not harm the squirrels, and presents no legal difficulties. Squirrels usually gain entrance to attics and other structures from the roof, especially if tree limbs overlap the roof line. This problem can be solved by trimming tree limbs back at least 8 to 10 feet from the roof. If this is not possible, sheet metal bands can be placed around the trunks of the trees to discourage squirrels from climbing them. The bands should be about 2 feet wide and 6 to 8 feet from the ground. This method is especially effective when a single tree provides access to the roof. If squirrels can jump from tree to tree, however, this method may not be effective. If this is the case, an effort must be made to exclude them from the attic.

Squirrels usually enter attics through vents, which often are not adequately screened. However, they will sometimes gnaw their way into the attic. All points of entry must be sealed if the squirrels are to be excluded. Sheet metal,

hardware cloth, and steel wool are effective materials for sealing the openings. The openings should not be sealed until the squirrels are out of the building. This can be accomplished by installing a simple one-way door. This door will enable squirrels to leave the building, but not to reenter it.

### **Trapping**

Cage traps can be used to reduce local squirrel populations or to remove individual squirrels from an attic. Effective baits include fruit, peanut butter, nuts, seeds and vanilla extract. Cage traps are available from hardware or feed stores.

### **Chemicals**

At present there are no toxicants or fumigants registered for use against tree squirrels in Texas. Registered commercial repellents are available.

### **Shooting**

It is not advisable to shoot squirrels in urban areas because of the danger to other animals and people. Also, most cities have ordinances against discharging firearms within the city limits.

### **Restrictions**

Fox squirrels and gray squirrels are classified as game animals in Texas, but can be legally cage-trapped in areas where they are causing damage or creating a nuisance. Landowners wishing to live-trap squirrels and relocate them after they have been caught should notify representatives of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

For additional information contact the nearest office of Texas Cooperative Extension-Wildlife Services.

## **Biology and Reproduction**

### **Fox Squirrels**

Adult weight: 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> to 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> pounds.

Total length: 18 to 27 inches.

Color: Brownish-gray with an orange underside.

Tail: 7 to 14 inches, bushy.

Gestation period: 42 to 45 days.

Litter size: Average of three.

Litter number: One to two per year, usually born in March or April and again in August or September.

Weaning: 10 to 12 weeks.

Life span: 4 to 7 years.

### **Gray Squirrels**

Adult weight: 1 to 2 pounds.

Total length: 16 to 20 inches.

Color: Grayish.

Tail: 7 to 10 inches, bushy.

Gestation period: 42 to 44 days.

Litter size: Average of three.

Litter number: One to two per year, usually born in September or October and again in February or March.

Weaning: 12 weeks.

Life span: 6 to 10 years.

### **Flying Squirrels**

Adult weight: 5 ounces.

Total length: 8 to 11<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches.

Color: Pinkish-gray with a white underside.

Body: Broad webs of skin that connect the fore and hind legs.

Tail: Flat and bushy.

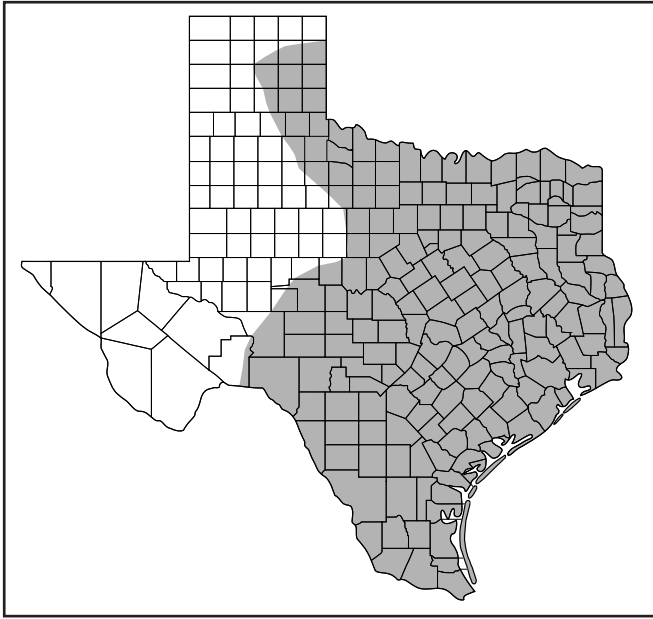
Gestation period: 40 days.

Litter size: Three to four.

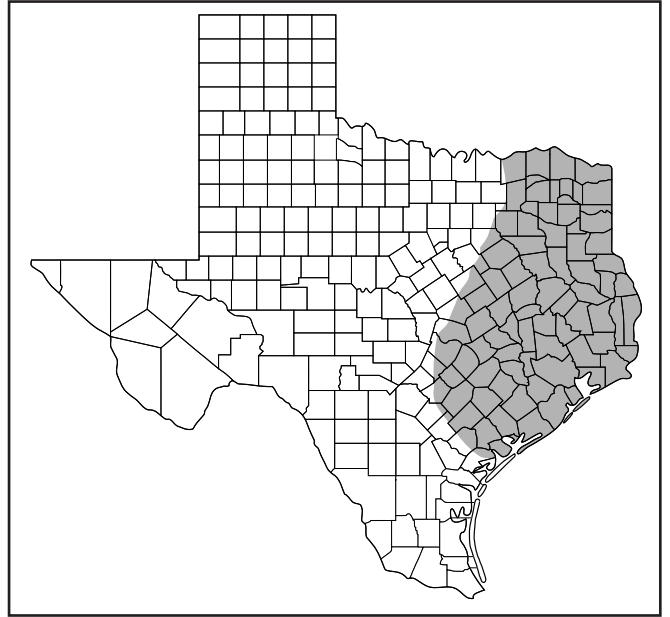
Litter number: Two per year, usually born in April or May and again in September.

Weaning: 6 to 8 weeks.

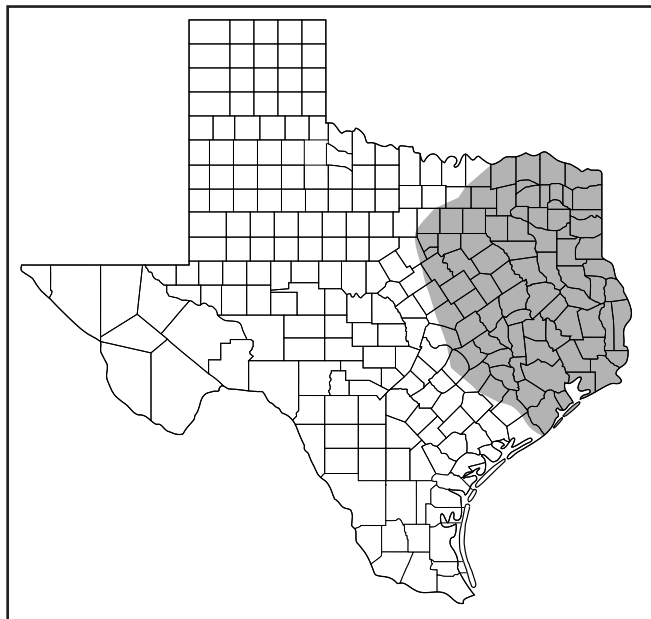
Life span: 5 to 6 years.



Distribution of the fox squirrel in Texas.



Distribution of the gray squirrel in Texas.



Distribution of the flying squirrel in Texas.

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