

The two most widespread species of tree squirrels in Alabama are the eastern gray squirrel and the fox squirrel. They are included with other rodents in the Order Rodentia. Gray squirrels typically weigh $\frac{3}{4}$ -1 $\frac{3}{4}$ pounds; fox squirrels typically weigh 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ -3 $\frac{1}{4}$ pounds. Fox squirrel densities average one squirrel /3-8 acres, whereas gray squirrels may attain densities of several squirrels/acre.



REPRODUCTION: Gray and fox squirrels typically have two breeding periods during the year. The first occurs from December until March and the second from April until August. The gestation period is approximately 44 days. Two litters are normally produced each year with an average of three young per litter.

PREFERRED FOODS AND HABITAT TYPES: Fox and gray squirrels are both highly dependent on hard mast during the fall including acorns from oaks, nuts from hickories and beech. During spring and summer, squirrels use berries, buds, insects and fungi. Although both den types are used by both species, fox squirrels generally prefer leaf nests for denning and gray squirrels prefer tree cavities. Fox squirrels occur more frequently in mixed upland pine stands. Gray squirrels prefer the edges of mature bottomland hardwoods. Gray squirrels are more abundant in mountainous regions.

MANAGEMENT: Retention of mature mast trees is critical. Retaining mast producing trees greater than 16 inches dbh and harvesting less than 50% of timber volume should maintain squirrel populations. Wide Streamside Management Zones (>200 feet) containing mast producing trees should also be retained. Prescribe burn upland pine stands to prevent hardwood encroachment and provide suitable habitat for fox squirrels.

DISEASES AND PARASITES: Gray and fox squirrels are susceptible to a variety of diseases and parasites including leptospira, tularemia, ringworm, cutaneous warbles and mites. Cutaneous warbles are simply larval flies that temporarily use the squirrel as a host for reproduction and are unsightly but relatively harmless. Mites are the cause of mange, which occurs frequently in squirrel populations.

Photo Credit: Joe Martin, USFWS



This information is provided by the Alabama Forestry Commission

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