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MAKING FRIENDS WITH SQUIRRELS

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Y'll never see, in this old worl' As beautiful as, the common squirrel!



The common squirrel is everywhere. Watching, hanging out with, and giving treats to them is one great, and not too expensive way to enjoy being outdoors. Their ways of communicating with you and with each other are endearing beyond words!

Click for [this squirrel photo story](#) - it has got to be the ultimate!

Most eastern squirrels are "Eastern Grey" type. Eastern Greys include the all black squirrels too - black or dark brown Eastern Greys are frequently seen.

SOME ENDEARING FACTS ABOUT SQUIRRELS:

- In sunlight, with a squirrel near your feet, you can see that they have light stripes, much like cats
- The reason these intelligent little animals will bite off the tip of a peanut shell when you toss one to them is to prevent the peanut from germinating (growing) when they bury it
- Squirrels fortunate enough to have a tree den (hole in a tree, as opposed to a nest made of twigs and leaves) allow only blood relatives to live there with the original owner. In bitter cold weather, they allow non-relatives to pack inside overnight, but they must leave the following morning.
- Baby squirrels purr loudly, like cats
- When you toss a treat to a squirrel, they will often pick it up, turn back towards you, and look right at you for a couple of seconds, which seems to be their saying "thank you"

Squirrels are very intelligent and curious. In a group of squirrels, a few can become almost as friendly as a cat or dog. They know very well that any sudden movement by a human could cause them to be injured, so they will always be slightly wary, even with people they have come to love. If you are trying to become friends with a squirrel, the most important thing is to understand their wariness, and do all you can to show them you will do them no harm.



SQUIRREL BEHAVIOUR WHEN GIVING THEM TREATS

One interesting trait I've observed in squirrels, particularly nursing mother squirrels, (and crows too,) is that if I leave treats and walk away, many of the squirrels will ignore the left-behind treats and keep walking with me, hoping for me to give them more, "in person." My guess is that they figure they will take a chance on the left-behind treats staying there, and retrieving them later.

Speaking of nursing mother squirrels, I've had three or four of them form a semi-circle at my feet, so they can all eat their fill. They are of course, eating for themselves and their babies.

TIPS ON GIVING WATER AND TREATS TO SQUIRRELS

The best way to befriend any wild animal is to feed them. Not all foods are healthy for these little friends. Here are some ideas on feeding squirrels:

- Provide **WATER** in any way you can. Most parks do not have places where squirrels can get a drink easily. Bring a water dish with you and place it about ten feet from where you stand to feed them. They will **REALLY** appreciate it in dry times, and that includes winter when there is no snow on the ground. Remember how dry your mouth can get on cold winter days! Sometimes, in a park, you can find a hollow place you can fill with water to help the squirrels for a day or so.
- If your park has healthy shrubbery or suitable trees, consider **HIDING** water dishes or polyethylene cups so they are not readily seen by other park users or maintenance staff, and refilling them periodically. By means of careful small-then-medium multiple drill bit drilling of sturdy polyethylene cups to prevent cracking, it is possible to attach water cups to the bases of shrubbery or tree trunks in ways where the cups are not readily visible. Hiding small dishes in the center of bushes, or in the tall growth along a creek bed in dry times is another alternative placement.
- If you can carry enough water for a dish, those green plastic "saucers" used under flower pots are both inexpensive and the green or dark brown colour blends in well. Crockery is fine too, but always

AVOID METAL, as animals' tongues and lips can freeze to metal.

For those who can't carry large quantities of water, those small black plastic cups, maybe 1-1/4" diameter, used as caps for metal table legs, can still provide welcome refreshment for squirrels. If possible, use the cup to dig a small hollow in soil and push the cup down into the hollow, and push the soil around the outside of the cup so it is held somewhat firmly. Animals can be careless and step on the rim, tipping the cup over. In bad drought, I leave two or three of these mini-cups, secured in the soil, so if one is tipped over (or even stolen by a squirrel!) there is still water for thirsty passers-by.

- Whenever I refill water cups, I leave a couple of peanuts as "announcer" peanuts to let wildlife know the cups have been refilled. I usually do my refilling early in the morning so as not to attract attention to the water cups. Are these cups and dishes appreciated? I timed the attendance at one dish on a cold, dry November day, and 40 squirrels visited the dish in 10 minutes!
- In sub-freezing weather, I have found that bringing hot tap water out to the cups and dishes is enthusiastically received by squirrels and birds.
- For attaching the larger cups for mechanical stability, so squirrels won't tip them over, use stainless steel screws and washers. I'd recommend at least a 1-inch screw length for thin-bark conditions, and at least a 2-inch screw length for thick bark conditions. The square "Robertson" drive screws work best for me, as it is easier to push hard on the screw driver, which is needed to penetrate live wood. I use a #8 screw for smaller trunks, or a #10 screw for larger trunks. Washers on the inside of the cup help spread the holding tension evenly and make cracking the cup less likely.

Cushioning on the inside and outside of the screw hole in the rim of the cups (i.e. between the washer and the cup) with "Mortite" or other permanently flexible outdoor crack seal material allows the cups to be held firmly, without water leakage, and to provide "give" as the shrubbery or tree grows. Check that the crack seal you are using does not result in strong chemicals entering the water. I have found that "Mortite" does not. As years pass, unscrew the attaching screw a couple of turns to accommodate growth.

Many suitable water cups come with a molded "rib" around the outside, near the rim. I usually cut the rib off on the tree side, using a hack saw for larger cups, or, I snip it off with diagonal cutting pliers with smaller cups.

- Below is an alternative idea for water-for-wildlife cups which resists tipping but does not require mounting on trees or bushes. These small cups, if refilled daily, can still serve thirsty wildlife without requiring the wildlife lover to carry large amounts of water. A godsend in drought conditions!



- When setting water out in winter for animals, don't worry about the water freezing. Animals, squirrels included, know how to scrape a dish of ice with their front teeth so they can drink the ice shavings. Squirrels scrape dishes or cups so well that they scoop out most of the ice. **AVOID** metal dishes to prevent their getting lips or tongues frozen to the metal.
- If you are attempting to get a sick or injured squirrel to take water, which squirrels under stress don't always think to seek out, **FLOAT** each peanut on the surface of a small, flat cup of water, such as a lid for a plastic food storage cup. This will induce the squirrel to take water with each peanut, significantly improving their health no matter what their condition. In extremely dry weather, winter or summer, treat your squirrel colony to a bag of ice cubes. I have seen squirrels take ice cubes up into trees to enjoy them!

Heavy **DEW**, frost, or snow and ice provide water to squirrels. They really need extra water in dry years, such as 2007, when almost no dew was deposited for the entire warm weather season. If you notice that the grass isn't dripping wet in the early morning, think about leaving a water dish for squirrels.

- Only feed **BREAD** when the squirrels have plenty of water (or snow) to drink. Bread on a hot summer day is a bad idea.

PEANUTS are the least expensive. It is very important that the peanuts be roasted. Raw peanuts can make squirrels sick. You can make sure peanuts are roasted by their colour. (Unroasted peanuts are white, and their shells are soft and hard to open.)

FILBERTS (Hazel nuts) and **ALMONDS** are more expensive, and the squirrels love them. Filberts and almonds are good to leave when you want to be sure the birds don't get them before the squirrels do.

- I've heard **SALT** referred to as "deer candy." Today's salted nuts tend to have far less salt on them compared with salted treats a couple of decades ago. I've also heard one bee keeper report that he sets a small amount of salt out for his bees. I've heard all animal life forms need salt. I've observed both squirrels and birds lapping at places where road or sidewalk salt has accumulated.

Consequently, I have switched from unsalted to salted nuts for squirrels, making sure the amount of salt is light. I haven't heard any complaints so far! :-)

I would advise **NOT** using any salty or drying treats in **DROUGHT** conditions, however. With salted nuts, the salt can be rinsed off and the nuts then dried. No crackers or bread during drought. And drought has become much more common.

The exception would be where you can assure a generous and continuous supply of water is available for your squirrels. On public access property, I have found that I can often get water to the squirrels, but I can't guarantee that the water I leave will be continuously available, so I back off salted or drying treats during drought conditions.

DO NOT OVERFEED WILDLIFE!

This is extremely important for two reasons. First, feeding them more than "snacks" will cause them to over-populate. It is dreadfully unfair to these creatures to create a lot of babies, and then when you stop feeding them, (and all of us will sooner or later be forced to stop,) to put that large group of animal friends through starvation, and the horrible experience of having to fight their mates and relatives for food!

The way I decide how much to feed is to, generally, give a squirrel as much as they want, while I am right there with them. Leaving any extra is done very sparingly. One exception to that is in the bitter cold weather, I do leave moderate amounts of food where I know for certain squirrel families live.

In summer, water is important, but generally, squirrels' natural food is at least adequate up until the leaves fall. (One exception would be in drought conditions.) Please, don't be a "fair weather feeder," feeding in

warm weather but not in cold weather. That puts your local squirrel population under much more stress than nature would otherwise do. If you commit to feeding squirrels, then commit to visiting them with treats in the winter as well.

The second reason for not overfeeding wildlife is that food left around is a nuisance for other park users, say, or private or city property owners. If there is any chance that treats left behind will not soon be taken up by the squirrels, hide in places you know the squirrels will find.

Along with not overfeeding, please, if you know you are going to move, leave for college or the military, or know for any reason you will have to stop feeding and you know the approximate date, **TAPER OFF** the amount you give your squirrel colony. (Unless, of course, you are one of a group who feed that colony.) I recommend tapering off over two to three months if possible to give your squirrel friends the least discomfort.

WHEN YOU MUST LEAVE SQUIRREL FOOD OUT

When I moved from a city with an abundant squirrel population in the large parks to a small wilderness village, I found situations where I felt obliged to leave food for squirrels or chipmunks.

When predators are abundant, such as foxes, lynxes, racoons and other animals which will prey on squirrels or chipmunks, the visible squirrel population is very sparse. Additionally, in rocky, hilly terrain, liquid water for small animals may be very difficult to find once the snow has melted.

In these limited circumstances, I have left peanuts or other nuts in small quantity, in order to ensure the population of an area can endure the harsh winters and thrive.

I recommend leaving minimum quantities. This is to avoid making the squirrels or chipmunks overly dependent. Leave a "generous snack" amount, no more.

In spring-summer-fall, in areas where there is no liquid water available due to hilly, quickly-draining terrain, I leave a small plastic cup of water with the minimal quantity of food. A large, say, 1-1/4" diameter plastic table leg tip makes a good cup for this purpose. In summer, the water cups don't seem to get filled with rain very frequently so I put fresh water in the water cups daily, including after a rainfall.

If supporting a chipmunk population, once the snow begins, there is no need to keep feeding them because they will have put away substantial amounts of food in their dens during the warmer months. If I see chipmunk tracks, I may leave a small treat right in the chipmunk's den or hole in the snow during the snow season, but this is optional.

Squirrels need food all winter, of course - they do not hibernate.

HELPING SQUIRRELS AVOID PREDATORS

In winter, pay close attention to animal **TRACKS** in the vicinity of the area where you support the local squirrel colony. Tracks show you what you can do to help the squirrels, and also what you must do to minimize the threats to the squirrels.

Importantly, understand that **PREY** animals typically move by hopping, and leave tracks where their rear feet make imprints together, and their front feet also imprint together, but spaced wider apart. **PREDATORS** make tracks like cats or dogs, where the left and right feet do not make imprints next to one another. Foxes are, in my experience, the most common predators which threaten squirrels, and their tracks are very easy to recognize.

If you see predator tracks at or near your squirrel feeding point, I urge you to **IMMEDIATELY STOP FEEDING** at ground level in that area. Continuing to feed will first feed the predators - foxes will eat peanuts, but even worse, predators will frequent the area, and the chances are that they will kill the innocent squirrels or chipmunks.

This sounds harsh, but it is reality in a wilderness location where predators are numerous. Squirrels can survive eating tree bark and buds, so they aren't likely to starve if you have to stop feeding at a given area.

The only way I can think of to allow for continued feeding in an area frequented by predators is to locate a tree where the squirrel can access it withOUT having to traverse snow-covered ground, and put up a shoulder-height FEEDING PLATFORM. Particulars for a shoulder-height, crow-resistant feeder are at the end of this document, below.

In the bush, a no-snow-traversing area would be an area where tree branches are dense, and interlace with neighbouring trees. In a built-up area, it may be a tree adjacent to a telephone-cable run or fence-top which is used by squirrels as a winter thoroughfare. A roof on the feeding platform isn't needed - just place the nut cache in the snow on the platform, and COVER the cache with snow in winter, or leaves in summer. Turned-up edges are helpful to avoid having the food spilled in windy conditions, or by the squirrels. 1/2" drain holes should be used to avoid buildup of water and ice.

One way to reduce the likelihood of attracting predators is to use only commercial roasted peanuts in the shell. Commercial roasted peanuts usually have been on the shelf for some time, and have lost their strong scent. Once a squirrel has become accustomed to feeding at a point, there is enough scent for the squirrel to locate the peanuts even if covered by snow, but the commercial peanut scent isn't strong enough to attract predators.

HIDING SQUIRREL FOOD TO AVOID BIRDS SNATCHING IT

Wherever you leave squirrel food, unless in a crow and raven resistant feeder, it is very important to HIDE peanuts or other nuts left for squirrels or chipmunks, because if they are not hidden, crows and ravens will find them, and make a habit of checking out your feeding point frequently.

In winter, hiding is easy - just push a generous amount of loose snow over the peanut cache - and pack it down lightly. If on the ground, choose a spot for the cache next to the trunk of a tree, so the squirrel can quickly escape a predator. Notice how the prevailing winds drift the snow at the base of the tree, and put the cache at a point where the snow is relatively deep, and not scrubbed out by wind. I recommend on-ground feeding only to introduce local squirrels to your offerings - go to a feeding platform for long-term treats.

In summer, tuck the cache of nuts under a log, and hide it with a few fallen leaves. Leave just one peanut, say, out and visible to "announce" the feeding location to local squirrels, until they catch on.

STRAGGLER FOOD

In winter, I always leave "straggler food." The first squirrel to find a cache of nuts will usually eat or hide or bury all of it. If you intend to help more than one squirrel, it's a good idea to leave some of a food item that squirrel #1 will not hoard all for him- or herself. I use small milk bones for dogs, or other dry dog food for this purpose. This way, stragglers will have a chance of getting at least some food.



BEFRIENDING SQUIRRELS

Here are some things I've found to be helpful in making friends with these delightful, cute, furry friends:

- **Feed squirrels near trees or bushes, if possible. This gives the squirrel a quick way to escape if he/she should become frightened for some reason.**
- **Always let the SQUIRREL decide how close to come. When you walk towards a squirrel, stop about ten to fifteen feet from the squirrel. You can click your mouth to encourage the squirrel to come closer, but when the squirrel stops, let that be his/her choice. Gently toss the food so it lands in front of the squirrel. Try to aim for a spot where there is no deep grass or leaves. That will make it easier for the squirrel to see the food.**
- **Keep all body movements as quiet and slow as possible. Loud talking or laughing will scare squirrels. When you toss the food, try to keep loose clothing from flapping when your arm moves. Keeping your voice soft will make the squirrels feel comfortable.**
- **Especially, keep your FEET in one spot. The squirrels know your feet carry a lot of weight, and can do them harm. When you look around, if possible, keep your feet in one place without lifting them. I recommend not moving your feet or walking until all squirrels are ten or fifteen feet from you. Keeping your feet perfectly STILL while a squirrel is on the ground near you and eating is a VERY good way to make the squirrel feel comfortable near you.**
- **BABY STEPS PUT WILDLIFE AT EASE: One thing I've learned in hanging out with wildlife is that apparently, a human walking at normal human speed is seen as a significant threat by wildlife who have not yet decided you are a confirmed friend.**

When attempting to befriend a squirrel who is unaccustomed to humans, or not naturally very friendly, when approaching them, 30 to 50 feet away, start using TINY steps. Two-inch steps, just inching ahead. At the same time, don't stare directly at the squirrel. This simple procedure can make a dramatic difference in how much a squirrel trusts an approaching human.

In addition, hold a palm-full of peanuts in plain view of the squirrel, if possible.

On successive days, you will see whether baby steps are having the effect you hope to achieve.

- **SITTING DOWN PUTS WILDLIFE AT EASE: This is another important principle which helps make friends with wild animals.**

Spend some time sitting in the general vicinity of the squirrel you want to befriend. Don't stare at the

squirrel - if you watch, do so with your side vision. Once a squirrel has decided you are a confirmed friend, looking directly at them will be fine.

Baby steps and sitting down will not make a squirrel suddenly trust you, but if repeated on subsequent meetings, this will give you the best chance of making a new squirrel friend.

- I recommend not trying to make the squirrel take food from your hand. If a squirrel does this, let it be the squirrel's choice. Many squirrels will take food from your hand, but you can see that most squirrels are nervous doing this. I have had squirrels accidentally put their mouths over my finger instead of taking a peanut from me. They did not bite. This was an accident, and the squirrels did not mean to take my finger.
- **DO NOT TRY TO GET SQUIRRELS TO TAKE FOOD FROM YOUR HAND IN COLD WEATHER, OR WITH OTHER SQUIRRELS NEARBY.** I got one nasty bite because a squirrel wanted to be sure HE got the peanut one cold autumn evening, instead of the other squirrels nearby. He did not want to attack me, he was just nervous, cold, and hungry.
- When sitting down or at a picnic table, squirrels may hop up on the bench, the table, or even your lap. You don't need to be afraid of squirrels. Their claws are sharp so they can quickly climb trees, but if the squirrel touches you or climbs on you, you can be sure it just wants food, and does not want to put you in any danger. If you are nervous having a squirrel touch you, just stand up, and the squirrel will move away.
- When you finish feeding and want to leave, if a squirrel is on the ground eating near you, step backwards (CHECK that no squirrel is behind you) and walk way around the squirrel. This is very good courtesy and will help that squirrel feel comfortable coming near you when you feed it again.

SQUIRRELS AND DISEASE

Squirrels rarely carry diseases. They even build two or more nests so they can move around every few days to avoid fleas and other parasites. When I was bitten, the hospital emergency doctor told me I did not need rabies shots, and I did not even need an antibiotic. The bite healed quickly with no problems.

FINDING A BABY SQUIRREL

If you should find a baby squirrel on the ground, you can pick it up and keep it WARM. Stay at that place for half an hour, and see if a mother squirrel comes looking for the baby. Keep the baby WARM. After half an hour, and you see no other squirrels in the area, take it home, put it in a cardboard box with soft clothing like tee shirts. **DO NOT USE TERRY CLOTH TOWELS, BECAUSE THESE CAN BREAK THE CLAWS ON BABY SQUIRRELS.**

Lightly cover the baby's body with a fold of cloth, and be sure the baby can keep warm using its own body heat. Do not use a heating pad or heat lamp. If the baby is amenable, you could try your own body heat.

Wait a FULL HOUR, then you can try a medicine dropper with puppy formula. NEVER COW'S MILK, say the experts I've spoken to. Powdered puppy formula will keep for a long time in your fridge. Apparently, say the experts I've talked to, kitten formula is not recommended.

I recommend attempting to have a small plastic medicine dropper on hand for feeding baby animals - there is always some risk of glass breakage.

If the baby has a full coat of fur and its eyes are open, a peanut taken out of the shell can be offered. Small sections of fruit may be offered. If dropper feeding doesn't work, offer a shallow water dish, placed on a cookie sheet, as squirrels often tip dishes by stepping on the rim. Having a very small no-tip pet dish might be handy.

It is urgent that you immediately call the local department of natural resources, or a nearby veterinarian,

and ASK HOW TO CONTACT THE NEAREST LICENCED SQUIRREL REHABILITATOR. It is against the law in many places to rehabilitate an orphaned baby squirrel yourself. In my city, the SPCA has been unable to help me when I found an orphaned baby. It was local veterinarians who helped me find a licenced squirrel rehabilitator.

HOW SQUIRREL LOVERS FEEL ABOUT THEIR FURRY FRIENDS

I am SO lucky to count squirrels among my "friends in high places!"



OTHER WILDLIFE ARTICLES:

<http://www.randomcollection.info/ewrescue.pdf>

<http://www.randomcollection.info/snail-story.pdf>

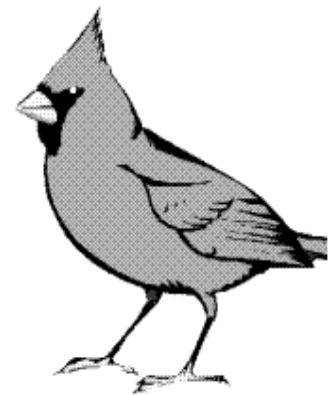
<http://www.randomcollection.info/crowchron.pdf>

<http://www.randomcollection.info/geese.pdf>

Please consider the sometimes life-and-death matter of water for local wildlife. The image on the following page could be used to remind people in your area of this sometimes urgent need:

REMEMBER ...

AS YOU DRINK THAT WATER, OUR BEAUTIFUL WILDLIFE COMPANIONS NEED IT TOO! AND IN CITIES, IT IS VERY HARD FOR THEM TO FIND!



WEATHER HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY DRY SINCE THE LATE 1990s. **DEW**** HAS ALMOST DISAPPEARED. PLEASE CONSIDER SETTING OUT WATER DISHES TO PREVENT THE SUFFERING AND DEATH OF OUR BEAUTIFUL WILDLIFE.**

PLEASE CONSIDER DOING THIS IN COOL BUT DRY WEATHER AS WELL ... WINTER CAN BE MERCILESSLY DRY, AND THERE ARE NO LAWN SPRINKLERS! WILDLIFE WILL EAT ICE GLADLY!

THEY WILL APPRECIATE IT!

And let's not forget the squirrel's dear little cousin:



**SEE CROW AND RAVEN RESISTANT
SHOULDER HEIGHT SQUIRREL
FEEDER, BELOW**

The link mentioned below for the modifications required by squirrel and crow activity is at:
<http://www.randomcollection.info/sqfeeder-mods.pdf>

CROW-RESISTANT SHOULDER-HEIGHT SQUIRREL FEEDER



IMPORTANT

A couple of years after putting up this feeder, clever crows forced a couple of modifications. See [sqfeeder-mods.pdf](http://www.randomcollection.info/sqfeeder-mods.pdf)

NOTES:

1. LIVING TREE WOOD IS VERY HARD. BE SURE TO PRE-DRILL THE TREE TRUNK WITH PILOT HOLES APPROPRIATE TO THE THREAD SIZE.
2. SHOULDER HEIGHT NEEDED TO AVOID PREDATORS FEEDING AND THREATENING SQUIRRELS.
3. WATER CUP IS ON ANGLE BRACKET SO IT CAN BE TURNED UPSIDE DOWN AND EMPTIED. TRY TO AVOID CUP BEING FULL OF ICE IN WINTER TO AVOID BREAKAGE. ADD SOME SALT TO ANY ICE IN WINTER - SQUIRRELS ENJOY THAT.
4. LOOSEN FEEDER AND WATER CUP MOUNTING SCREWS ONCE (MAYBE TWICE) A YEAR TO AVOID TREE GROWTH FROM CRACKING THE FEEDER PARTS.
5. THE FEEDER SHOWN HAS PROVEN RESISTANT TO THEFT OF SQUIRRELS' FOOD BY CROWS AND RAVENS. HIDING FOOD UNDER SNOW OR LEAVES IS ANOTHER WAY TO INCREASE THE CHANCES THE FOOD WON'T BE STOLEN BY BIRDS.