



DELMARVA FOX SQUIRREL

BACKFROMTHEBRINK.ORG

The Bigger but Shyer Cousin of the Common Squirrel

The noticeably larger Delmarva fox squirrel is not easily confused with its smaller kin, the eastern gray squirrel so common to suburban backyards. One of 10 fox squirrel subspecies, the Delmarva makes its home in mature hardwood and pine forests of the Delmarva Peninsula, where portions of Delaware, Maryland and Virginia form the eastern border of the Chesapeake Bay. Like other squirrels, the Delmarva eats a wide variety of forest vegetation, including nuts, seeds, young leaves and fruit. Unlike the gray squirrel, it spends most of its time on the ground and even feeds in corn and other crop fields. Its young are raised inside tree cavities or leaf nests where the squirrels also winter.

At-Risk Story

It is believed that the fox squirrel had dwindled earlier in the 19th and 20th centuries because they were hunted for food and because much of their forested habitat on the Delmarva Peninsula had been cleared for agriculture. Due to their high risk of extinction, Delmarva fox squirrels were first protected in 1967 under pioneering federal endangered species laws.

Characteristics

The Delmarva fox squirrel may grow to be twice as massive and 50 percent longer than the common gray squirrel--up to 30 inches (compared with the gray's average 20-inch length) and typically weighs between 1¾ to 3 pounds (double the weight range of its smaller cousin). Its fat, fluffy tail can be as long as 15 inches (compared with the gray's 10-inch tail). The Delmarva has a light, whitish-gray coat, a silvery tail with black edging, white feet and a stubbier neck and rounder, shorter ears than its suburban counterpart.

Threats to Survival

The conversion of forestland and farmland to developed land on the Delmarva Peninsula is happening at a shocking rate and is resulting in the rapid loss of potential squirrel habitat. Further, as development increases, roads and traffic increase, further fragmenting squirrel populations and causing more squirrel road kills. Extensive clear-cutting can also be harmful to the squirrel although research suggests that timber harvesting can be done in a number of ways that do not reduce their populations.



The Situation Today

The Delmarva fox squirrel is found in mature hardwood and pine forests of the Delmarva Peninsula, which forms the eastern border of the Chesapeake Bay. Considered at risk of extinction early on--from being hunted for food and losing its habitat--the large squirrel was first protected under federal endangered species laws in 1967. Through the dedicated efforts of state agencies, particularly in Maryland, squirrels have been

reestablished in many areas of forest—a now much more common habitat on the peninsula than 100 years ago. However, today the squirrel is still vulnerable because forest and field cover is again declining as development spreads. Recovery of the squirrel will depend upon the ability of managers to find ways to maintain forestry and crop agriculture on the Delmarva landscape and to work with landowners so that forestry and squirrels can coexist.

Our 10-Year Vision

Our goal is to work together with state agencies and private landowners to see that sufficient forests and fields are maintained on the Delmarva Peninsula of Maryland, Delaware and Virginia to support 20 squirrel populations and provide corridor habitat to connect many of them. We want to ensure that at least half of the habitat needed to recover the squirrel remains intact and is managed in a way that can support squirrels for the foreseeable future.

Restoration Needed

- Expanded efforts to reintroduce squirrels into the Virginia habitat
- Agreements to address regulatory issues in Maryland and Virginia so that landowner concerns do not impede reintroduction efforts
- Incentives that facilitate the timber harvest practices that squirrels can tolerate
- Protection of corridors of working farms and forestland

Acres/Landowners Needed

8,000 acres and between 50 and 100 landowners

Cost of Recovery

Environmental Defense believes significant progress toward recovery can be made with a modest amount of money if it is targeted to specific areas and activities. Over the next 10 years, we will work to direct more than \$600,000 to on-the-ground restoration projects that will help bring the Delmarva fox squirrel Back from the Brink.

Every Dollar Counts

\$5 will fund the purchase of oak seedlings to be planted in pine forest areas, thus creating future acorn-producing habitat for the squirrel.

\$500 will fund a site assessment to plan how habitat can be managed to benefit squirrels.

\$10,000 will fund efforts to reintroduce squirrels to a new site during a year.