

eastern gray squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Mammalia

Order: Rodentia

Family: Sciuridae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

The eastern gray squirrel's head-body length is between eight and 11 inches, with its tail about the same length as the body. Its body fur is gray, and there is a border of white fur on the bushy, gray tail. The belly fur is white, a cream line surrounds each eye, and white tips are present on the back of the ears.

BEHAVIORS

The eastern gray squirrel may be found statewide in Illinois. It lives in woods or forests that have a closed canopy, nut-bearing trees and plenty of cavity trees. As these mature forests have been destroyed in Illinois, the population of gray squirrels has declined. However, gray squirrels are common in cities. Here, they live in trees without the conditions described above. The gray squirrel eats buds, leaves, fruits, berries, fungi, pecans, acorns, hickory nuts, tree bark, walnuts and the seeds of various other trees. It stores nuts in holes in the ground. This squirrel grasps food in its front paws. It is primarily arboreal, and its large, bushy tail helps it balance while climbing and resting in trees. Urban squirrels are good at climbing brick walls and walking along wires and cables. The eastern gray squirrel does not hibernate and is active during the day year round. It may sleep for several consecutive days in winter, however. Its call is "kuk-kuk-cut-cut-cut." This animal builds a leaf nest in the high branches of a tree but may use a tree cavity for escape from predators and poor weather and for raising its young. Mating occurs in January and again in June and July. Females two years old and older produce two litters per year. Females about one year old usually breed once in a year. Females are often chased by the males at this time and may "bark" while being pursued. A leaf nest, tree cavity or humanmade nest box may be used to rear the young. Two or three young are born after a gestation period of about six weeks. Young nurse for about two months.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

bottomland forests

Woodland Habitats

bottomland forests; coniferous forests; southern Illinois lowlands; upland deciduous forests

Prairie and Edge Habitats

edge

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