

June 2010

Amazing Animals Flying Squirrels

Two species of flying squirrel, the **northern flying squirrel** (*Glaucomys sabrinus*) and **southern flying squirrel** (*Glaucomys volans*) can be residents in Midland County. Although the southern flying squirrel tends to be slightly smaller than its northern cousin, the only way to tell them apart for sure is an inspection of their belly hairs. The hairs on the southern species are entirely white while the northern flying squirrel hairs are slate gray at the base.



Both species occupy mature forests where they can find tree cavities to use for nests and winter dens. The southern species prefers areas with a few open, shrubby spots which makes gliding easier and provides cover when the squirrels are on the ground. The northern species seems to prefer a mix of coniferous and deciduous species.

Neither species truly flies, but instead glides from tree to tree using the loose skin, or *patagium*, that stretches from its front to hind limbs. Although capable of gliding 100 feet or more, most trips are much shorter. Squirrels usually land on a tree trunk within a few feet of the ground. Entirely nocturnal, these squirrels enjoy nuts, berries, lichen, sap and the occasional bird egg or insect. Flying squirrels live for 4 or 5 years in the wild but due to their nocturnal habit, they are rarely seen by people.

Other Squirrels



The **red squirrel** is one of the smaller members of the family with the adult measuring only 14 inches from

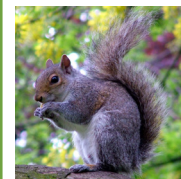
head to tail. They are very vocal and most active at dawn and dusk.

Preferring open wood lots, backyards, and forest edges, the **fox squirrel** is our largest squirrel with the



exception of the woodchuck. Usually solitary, it is active during the day with a home range between 5 and 10 acres.

Grey squirrels have two color phases, black and grey.



This medium-sized squirrel prefers areas with lots of mature deciduous trees.

As you walk through the woods you may hear the loud warning chirp of the **eastern chipmunk**. Usually ground dwelling, the chipmunk sometimes climbs shrubs or limbs.



Visit the Temporary Visitor Center for program information.

This inSTALLation is available online at www.chippewanaturecenter.org under the Naturalist Section.