

You can learn something by watching squirrels

It was a little chilly last Saturday morning, so, after putting on the coffee, I ventured outside to build a campfire. The thermometer on the tree was registering 40 degrees, and you could see your breath. The official beginning to fall was only hours away. While snuggling close to the fire, my wife and I enjoyed the serene quiet of our surroundings. You could hear the birds in the woods, but nothing else was stirring the air.

We could hear noises from not far away, like something falling from the trees. We scoured the area and finally located the source. Acorns were falling like rain from the trees. There must be a squirrel around.

Sure enough, there it was, high in an oak tree, stripping it of its acorns, and dropping them to the



ground, gathering food that it will need to make it through the winter. Next, it made its way from tree to tree, like a traveler connecting with different roads to reach his destination. Once on the ground, the shuttles to-and-from its den were underway.

Eastern gray squirrels eat a range of foods, such as tree bark, many types of seeds and acorns, walnuts, and other nuts, and some types of fungi found in the forests. On very rare occasions, when its usual food source is scarce, gray squirrels will also prey on insects, frogs, small rodents, including other squirrels, and small birds, their eggs and young. They will also, sometimes, eat bones.

As much as we despise the presence of these little pests during the summer months when they ingeniously figure out ways to get into our "squirrel proof" bird feeders, they are enjoyable to watch when they go about their annual ritual of food gathering. And, if you own a dog, you know how they can drive your Fido crazy, merely by their presence nearby.

As a matter of fact, squirrels are hoarders. It hoards food in numerous small caches for later recovery. Some caches are quite temporary, especially those made near the site of a sudden abundance of food which can be retrieved within hours or days for re-burial in a more secure site. Others are more permanent and are not retrieved until months later. It has been estimated that each squirrel makes several thousand caches each season. The squirrels have very accurate memories for the locations of these caches, and use distant and nearby landmarks to retrieve them. Smell is used once the squirrel is within a few feet of the

cache.

It is one of very few mammals that can descend a tree head-first. It does this by turning its feet so that the claws of its hindpaws are backward pointing and can grip the tree bark.

The Eastern gray squirrels, *Sciurus carolinensis*, are more active during the early and late hours of the day, and tend to

avoid the heat in the middle of a summer day. They do not hibernate.

Predators of the gray squirrels are humans, hawks, skunks, raccoons, domestic and feral cats, snakes, owls and dogs. On occasion, a squirrel may lose part of its tail while escaping a predator.

Gray squirrels, as the name suggests, are predominantly gray, but it can have a reddish color. Black squirrels can be found in large parts of southeastern Canada. There are also genetic variations within these, including those with black tails and black colored squirrels with white tails.

The genus of the squirrels, *Sciurus*, is derived from two Greek words: *skia*, meaning shadow, and *oura*, meaning tail. This name alludes to the squirrel sitting in the "shadow of its tail."

Gray squirrels have a high tolerance for humans to inhabit residential neighborhoods and will raid bird feeders for millet, corn and sunflower seeds.

As annoying as they can be, the eastern gray squirrel is interesting to watch, and may be a mentor to us as to its work ethic, always looking ahead to the coming winter months.

About the NFL

How to figure the NFL!? In week one, the Patriots beat the Bengals, the Ravens beat the Jets. In week two, the Jets beat the

Pigskin action in the youth leagues



Above, Waterville's Jack Thompson (1) works to keep possession of the football as a host of Winslow players converge. Right, Justin Laflamme, of Winslow, has his eyes set on oncoming defenders in the same game.

Photos by Eli Fitzgerald/Central Maine Photography



SCORES & OUTDOORS

by Roland D. Hallee

Displaying their hardware

Right, Huard's Sport Karate team members Devin Pickett, left, and Dylan Gagne, both of Sidney, pose with their trophies after competing at the Pine Tree State Karate Championships in Freeport, on September 11.

Photo by Todd Gagne/Central Maine Photography



Patriots, and the Bengals beat the Ravens. So, let's look at it this way: During the first two weeks of the season, the Patriots lost to the team (the Jets), that lost to the team (the Ravens), that lost to the team (the Bengals) that the Patriots routed (the Bengals, 38-24) in week one. Go figure!

Roland's trivia question of the week:

On the current Red Sox, J. D. Drew is tied for third in home runs with 19. Who is the other player.

Answer on page 15.

Kevin Youkilis, who hasn't played since August 6. (David Ortiz and Adrian Beltre are the top two.)

MAINE SKIRMISH GRAPPLING TOURNAMENT

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