

Squirrel flies to bird feeder

By Timothy Nowicki
special writer

FEEDING stations erected in a backyard are generally designed for birds. But many people know that birds are not the only creatures that use their feeders.

Squirrels are fond of sunflower seeds and go to great extremes to snatch them. Fox squirrels, gray squirrels and red squirrels can be seen eating seeds at feeders during the day. Some people tolerate their appetite, while others engineer devices to deter them.

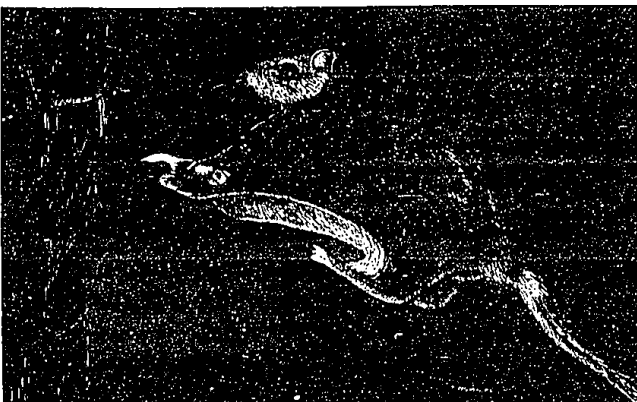
But when daylight disappears and nightfall arrives, we close the curtains on another day's activity at the feeder.

That may not be the end of activity at the feeder, though. SOUTHERN FLYING squirrels are very active and feed from dusk until dawn. Some researchers feel they may be the most active nocturnal animals.

Southern flying squirrels are one of two species of flying squirrels in Michigan. Northern flying squirrels, as their name implies, are found in the northern half of the state.

The species are similar. Their heads and bodies are only about six inches long. They have white underparts. And they both have a membrane of fur covered skin that extends between the fore and hind legs. This membrane acts like a sail to help the squirrel glide through the air. Flying squirrels do not flap the membrane like a bird flaps its wings. They climb to the top of a tree, push off and descend to as far as two feet away.

There is a spur of cartilage on the fore limb that is extended to support the membrane when gliding. By changing the position of the membrane, they can change direction while gliding as much as 90 degrees.



Flying squirrels visit bird feeders at night. They don't flap their gliding membrane but use a spur of cartilage on the forelimb to change direction while gliding.

How the squirrel got in the house is still a mystery, but it does illustrate that flying squirrels are in our area.

FLYING SQUIRRELS spend the daylight hours in old woodpecker holes, or natural cavities. In winter, there may be as many as 20 individuals in a cavity all huddled together trying to stay warm. Some friends of mine living in Dearborn had to remove a flying squirrel from their bedroom one

If you check your feeder at night, you may get a surprise, too.

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