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# Squirrel's memory great for nuts

**NATURE TRAILS**

**TIMOTHY NOWICKI**

they can do some pretty amazing things.

Their "tightrope" walking ability across telephone lines, their ability to jump from twig to twig, and their persistence in foraging our anti-squirrel devices are evidence enough that we are dealing with an amazing mammal.

Fall is the time when we often think about these industrious neighbors because they are busy storing nuts for the winter season. Scorching a lawn will often reveal several little holes where a squirrel has deposited a nut. Several months later, when fresh food supplies are scarce, they will dig up a nut and use it for energy.

This is a procedure we are all familiar with, but let's look at this procedure a little closer. How do they find those nuts that they buried? They don't find all of them, because we have young oak trees sprouting every year, but they do find most of them.

For many years squirrels were thought to find their food by their sense of smell. Mammals have a keen sense of smell, and since they buried the nut, they could leave an odor that would be detectable at a later date. It makes sense, but according to two separate studies, it's not the way they find their buried nuts.

They find them by remembering where they buried them.

It may seem hard for us to believe that such a small little animal could remember where all those nuts were buried, but that is exactly what the studies showed. They memorize the location of the buried nut in relation to local landmarks. If those landmarks are moved, or covered with snow, their retrieval rate is reduced.

This could be a hard winter for squirrels. Last year was a big mast or acorn crop which occurs about every three years.

Backyard feeding stations could be very helpful for these furry friends during the next two years. Providing cracked corn, whole corn, or sunflower seeds will help them survive through the cold winter season.

Tim Nowicki is a naturalist at Independence Oaks County Park in Oakland County. To leave a message for him from a touch-tone phone, call 953-2047, Ext. 1874.



**TIMOTHY NOWICKI**

**Remembering:** It may seem hard to believe, but studies show that squirrels memorize the location of the buried nut in relation to local landmarks.

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