



## **Black Squirrel**

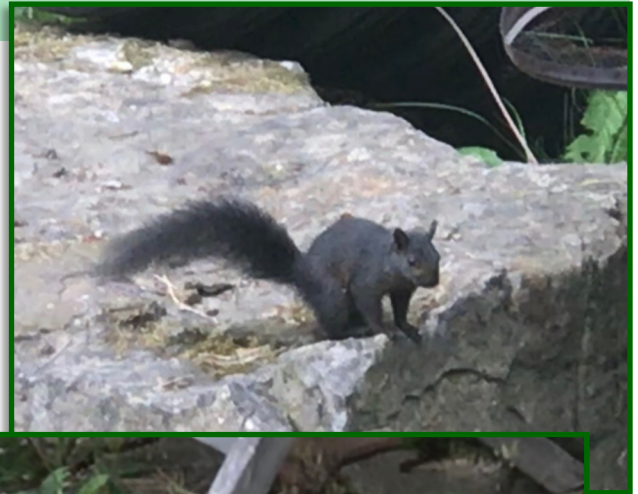
***Sciurus spp.***

Black squirrels are becoming more common in New Jersey, and therefore may be found in your neighborhood. Like all squirrels, they eat small amounts of protein by raiding bird nests and enjoy nuts of all kinds. So, if you have oak trees nearby, your chances are good that you may spot a black squirrel.

There is much debate on the origination of northeast black squirrels. Some research suggests they came from a genetic mutation in a pigment gene in fox squirrels, which was later passed on to their cousin, the eastern gray squirrel, through interspecies breeding.

Like all adaptations, there are pros and cons from an environmental perspective, and squirrels are no exception. In the northeast, one main reason black squirrels thrive is because they can tolerate cold temperatures better than they do heat. It's been suggested that their black coat is a selective advantage for inhabiting colder regions. Their heat-capturing black fur reduces loss of body heat, keeping them toasty-warm in comparison to gray squirrels.

Regardless of their color, squirrels are quite adorable and fun to observe from a distance. For the urban dweller, you can help squirrels out by installing squirrel boxes. By giving them a place to live, they shouldn't move into your home.



### **Ask A Naturalist**

- Black fur is very rare in squirrels
- About one in 10,000 squirrels have black fur

