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SQUIRRELS

Both tree squirrels and ground squirrels are common in the Los Angeles area. The main difference between these animals is where they nest, live, and hide from predators. Squirrels are diurnal animals and are active year around. Squirrels give birth twice a year, in the spring (January-April) and in the fall (August-September). There are 2-4 babies per litter. The babies are self-sustaining at about 12-14 weeks of age and will leave the natal area in search of their own territory.

TREE SQUIRREL BIOLOGY

Two species of tree squirrel often encountered in Los Angeles are the Western Grey Squirrel (*Sciurus griseus*), also known as the California Grey Squirrel, and the Eastern Fox Squirrel (*Sciurus niger*).

The Western Grey Squirrel is about 22 inches in length with a large bushy tail edged in white. The coat can run from a “salt and pepper” to a silvery grey above to white below. They weigh in at between 1.5-2 pounds and lack any stripes, spotting, or flecking common to ground squirrels.



Fox squirrels are the largest of the North American squirrels and can grow to 29 inches in total length, have a somewhat square head, bushy tail, and weigh 3 pounds. They usually have a light brown coat and a reddish or orange underside.

Tree squirrels are active during the day and are frequently seen in trees, running on utility lines, and foraging on the ground. Tree squirrels do not hibernate and are active year-round.

GROUND SQUIRREL BIOLOGY

California Ground Squirrels (*Otospermophilus beecheyi*) have mixed grey, light brown, and dusky fur giving the upper coat a mottled appearance. A band of slightly darker fur, flecked with light grey, extends from the head over the middle of the back. Grey fur forms a cape over the sides of the head and shoulders. The fur around the eyes is whitish, while that around the ears is black. Head and body are about 30 cm (12 in) long and the tail an additional 15 cm (5.9 in). In contrast to the tree squirrel, their tails are long and thin. California Ground Squirrels are primarily vegetarian, eating roots, stems, bark, shoots, leaves, flowers, fruit, nuts, seeds, acorns, mushrooms, and insects such as: grasshoppers, crickets, and caterpillars.



As is typical for ground squirrels, California ground squirrels live in burrows which they excavate themselves. Some burrows are occupied communally but each individual squirrel has its own entrance. Although they readily become tame in areas used by humans, and quickly learn to take food left or offered by picnickers, they spend most of their time within 25 m (82 ft) of their burrow, and rarely go further than 50 m (160 ft) from it.

In the colder parts of their range, California ground squirrels hibernate for several months, but where winters are mild some squirrels are active year round. In those parts where the summers are hot they may also estivate for periods of a few days. California Ground Squirrels live in burrows.

DAMAGE



Squirrels have powerful, gnawing teeth for eating tough vegetable matter, and they can close their mouths while leaving their front teeth exposed for digging. Their other distinguishing feature is that their teeth never stop growing. They must continue gnawing to wear them down so that they can close their mouths (otherwise they would be unable to take in food and would eventually starve) and so that their teeth do not grow into their skulls, eventually killing them. Tree squirrels damage green and ripe walnuts, almonds, oranges, avocados, apples, strawberries, tomatoes, and grains. Telephone and electrical lines are sometimes gnawed and they also chew on buildings or invade attics through knotholes or uncovered roof vents. Eastern Fox Squirrels can become mildly

aggressive and antagonize dogs and may frighten the elderly. Ground squirrels damage many food-bearing and ornamental plants. Particularly vulnerable are grains, nut and fruit trees such as: almond, apple, apricot, orange, peach, pistachio, prune, and walnut. Ground squirrels will enter gardens and devour vegetables in the seedling stage. They may damage young shrubs, vines, and trees by gnawing bark, eating twigs and leaves, and burrowing around roots. Ground squirrels will gnaw on plastic sprinkler heads and irrigation lines. They will also consume the eggs of ground-nesting birds. The burrowing of Ground squirrels also can be quite destructive. Burrows around trees and shrubs can damage and desiccate roots, and sometimes topple trees. Burrows beneath buildings and other structures sometimes necessitate repair.



DISEASE

All wildlife species including squirrels can carry diseases and parasites. Small rodents such as squirrels, rats, mice, hamsters, guinea pigs, gerbils, and chipmunks, rabbits and hares are almost never found to be infected with rabies and have not been known to cause rabies among humans in the United States. Bites by these animals are usually not considered a risk of rabies. Small



rodents may also carry other diseases such as: toxoplasmosis, sylvatic (bubonic) plague, western encephalitis, encephalomyocarditis, murine typhus, tularemia, endemic relapsing fever, and ringworm, all of which are still very rare. Ground squirrels can harbor diseases harmful to humans, particularly when squirrel populations are dense. Do not touch, pet, handle or feed squirrels as they are wild animals and may bite. A major concern is bubonic plague transmitted to humans by fleas carried on the squirrels. Ground squirrels are susceptible to plague, which has wiped out entire colonies. Currently, the plague in humans is relatively rare and can be successfully managed with antibiotics if contracted. Only 8 cases of the plague were reported in the State of California in the 1990's.

LAWS AND REGULATIONS

The California Department of Fish and Game regulations prohibit the relocation of squirrels or other healthy wildlife. Healthy wildlife "trapped in towns or cities or removed from under buildings or otherwise taken or trapped because of human/animal conflict shall be immediately released in the area where trapped or disposed of (euthanized) as directed or authorized by the Department (of Fish and Game)." Only authorized wildlife rehabilitators may keep injured or orphaned wildlife.

Ground squirrels are classified as nongame mammals by the California Fish and Game Code. Nongame mammals injuring growing crops or other property may be controlled in any **legal manner** by the owner or tenant.

Tree squirrels are classified as game mammals by the California Fish and Game Code and can be controlled **only** as provided by hunting regulations which **require permits** from the California Department of Fish and Game (Section 4181).

(California Fish & Game Code 4000, 4001, 4180 and California Code of Regulations Title 14 Section 465.5(g)(1) and 679(f))

The Culver City Animal Services Officer is not trained in euthanasia techniques. Due to Fish and Game regulation, the Animal Services Officer cannot transport or relocate any healthy wild animal. Therefore, Culver City Animal Services does not provide healthy squirrel removal services. If citizens have a routine healthy squirrel issue, they should contact a licensed private contractor of their choosing and citizens will be responsible for any cost incurred.

The Culver City Animal Services Officer will respond to calls for service ONLY if the squirrel is inside the living residence (not under the house, not around the house and not in the attic), is sick, is injured, is orphaned (for babies and the young), or is deceased.

PROBLEM PREVENTION

Wildlife is an important part of our environment. Raccoons, squirrels, rabbits, opossums, skunks, mallard ducks, Canada geese, and foxes can all be found in Culver City. They have adapted to or have found the modification we have made to the area appealing. While these animals are seldom a threat to people or domestic animals, there are several steps you can take to discourage wild animals from becoming a recurring problem. Squirrels are attracted to urban areas by the easy accessibility of food, water and shelter. Eliminating the availability of all these factors will encourage squirrels to leave. Prevention is the key to dealing with these wildlife nuisances and is the best all around solution to the problem both for the people and the wildlife. Addressing a problem requires much more work than prevention and is not nearly as satisfactory or effective.

A common misconception is that setting a live trap, catching and destroying the wildlife animal will take care of the nuisance. However, before too long another squirrel will move into the area. If it was a good habitat for one, it's just as good for another. Urban wildlife enjoys the easy life we often unknowingly provide for them; they don't like a hostile environment. Taking steps to deter them will encourage them to move on.

- Install a motion-activated or motion-sensored sprinkler. The motion-activated sprinkler can detect activity and when activated, it delivers a burst of water. The combination of the water spray, noise, and the motion of the sprinkler head is often effective at scaring off animal intruders and deterring skunks from specific areas near your home or garden. Check online search engines for videos of the motion-sensored sprinkler system in action. Internet stores sell the motion-sensored sprinkler devices for approximately \$45. Home improvement stores also carry the device for about \$110.



- Use metal or heavy plastic trash containers with tight fitting lids. Secure the lids with bungee cords, rope or sturdy cords. You may want to soak the cords or rope in a hot sauce or a commercial repellent. Spray a small amount of ammonia in and around all garbage cans. Remember to secure barbecues. You may want to pour a cup of ammonia in the trash can every week after the trash has been picked up. Animals don't like the smell and will be discouraged from digging in your trash. Most animals invade human space when searching and foraging for food. If the food supply is easier to obtain elsewhere, the animals are more likely to leave your property alone.



- Each fall and spring, inspect the exterior of your home for entrances that wildlife animals can use to get into the crawl space under your house. A squirrel does not need a large hole to enter. Make sure soffit vents and gable end vents are fastened securely. If you find vent grills open or crawl spaces open under your house, you will need to secure the openings to prevent the easy access. You can attach ¼-inch hardware cloth over the vent on the inside of the attic for extra security. Plug gaps between your foundations and sill plates. Cover foundation vents with slotted metal vent covers.



*L-Shaped screen application around foundation.***

- If squirrels take up residence under a low deck, they may be excluded by using ¼-inch grid screening or solid metal flashing. Trench around the perimeter of the deck a minimum of 12 inches deep, insert screening in trench, and backfill. Attach top of screening to facade of deck with nails or fence post staples. Squirrels can be excluded from buildings by covering foundation vents with slotted metal vent covers and by using ¼-inch grid screening to cover attic vents and chimneys. Before completing final seal on the last entry point, make sure no animals are trapped inside. On the night before completing



repairs, sprinkle flour in the entrance hole and check for tracks the following morning.

If no tracks are evident for three consecutive nights, no animals are likely present. You may wish to make a temporary one-way exit using ¼-inch grid screening. Form the screening into a cone or funnel shape that will permit animals to leave but not to reenter. The large end should be sized to encircle the entry hole and be attached over the hole to the facade of the deck or building with nails or fence post staples. The small end should face away from the house and be 4 to 6 inches in diameter.



*Power supply hole sealed with metal flashing.**

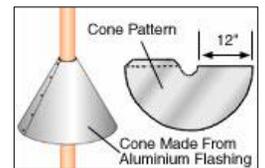
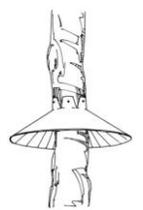
- Pet food is high in protein, carbohydrates and fats. By having your pet's food available to the animals, it discourages them from their normal hunting and foraging behavior and will keep them returning to your property and yard. Pets should be fed during daylight hours and any leftovers removed immediately. Empty or remove the water bowls at night. Be sure to lock pet doors and openings at night.



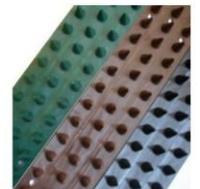
- If you have vegetables in your garden or fruit trees in your yard, use a basic wire fence to surround your low-lying plants as they ripen and pick up all fruit when it drops off the tree. If you leave it exposed, it is just another food source for the squirrels. Cage your plant bulbs. Before planting bulbs, set homemade or store-bought metal cages into planting holes. Alternatively, place a wire mesh over the entire bed once you've finished planting. Various barriers—chicken wire, hardware cloth, 1" to 2" metal mesh—can be spread over the ground and cut to fit around plant stems. You may also consider completely covering over newly planted vegetables with a chicken wire fence or completely caging-off your garden bushes and small trees before the fruit ripen.



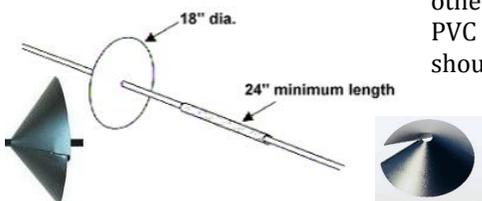
- Cover telephone and electric wires near the house with long plastic tubing to discourage use of the wires for entrance and exit. The best deterrent, besides removing the food source, is the installation of a 12" wide band of sheet metal (metal guard) and disc or cone baffles. To prevent squirrels from climbing trees, poles, and other vertical structures, install a metal or heavy plastic barrier 6 to 8 feet above the ground. A metal guard can be secured around trees, pipes, posts, and other structures to keep raccoons from climbing. It can be made from a piece of aluminum flashing or sheet metal, held together with wire, nails, or screws, and painted to blend in. 24-inch long aluminum or galvanized vent-pipe can serve as a pre-made barrier around a narrow support. A funnel-shaped piece of aluminum flashing can be fitted around a tree or other vertical structure. The outside edge of the flared metal should be at least 18 inches away from the support. Cut the material with tin snips and file down sharp edges. Squirrels will attempt to use surrounding trees or structures as an avenue to access the area above the barrier. Prune branches 6 feet away from the ground and from the roof of your property. Make sure no other trees are close enough to provide jumping access. This prevents the squirrels from scaling the tree trunk or accessing the branches, fruits, leaves and nuts. Keep squirrels away from roof areas by trimming tree branches 10 feet from roof and keeping climbing plants trimmed away from roof and eave areas.



- An important part of deterring squirrels from your garden is securing your perimeter. An effective method of doing this is to install plastic or polypropylene security spike deterrent strips on your fences to eliminate the most common ways that squirrels will get into your garden. The plastic spikes are designed to provide maximum discomfort and minimum harm. Please be advised that metal spikes or barbs on fencing are not permitted within Culver City. (Culver City Municipal Code 17.300.030)



- Disc baffle and pipe sleeves prevent squirrels from traveling on utility line wires, transformers, bird feeders and other aerial sites that have horizontal wires leading to them. Cut the plastic or PVC pipe lengthwise, spread it open, and place it over the wire. The sleeves should fit loosely so they rotate as the squirrels tries to traverse them. Sleeves should be at least 24 inches long. Disc baffles or metal collars should be at least 18 inches to 2 feet wide and placed 6 feet to 8 feet above the ground. Collar edges should overlap and connect by springs to allow for tree growth.



- If you wish to have someone trap and remove the skunk, you can hire a private nuisance wildlife control operator which generally can be found in the Yellow Pages under "Animal Removal Services." If you do consider a professional wildlife removal specialist who has the required permits to legally trap and remove wildlife, please keep in mind that removal of nuisance wildlife does not necessarily mean that you have removed the problem. Oftentimes, removing the animal just opens up space for another animal to move in and claim territory.

Your best solution would be to make your home and property inhospitable and unappealing to the unwanted animals with habitat modifications and exclusion methods.