

## Canadian Natural History.

## Squirrels.

Every one is familiar with the quick and lively squirrel; and though the little animal is a universal favorite, yet so strange is the perversity of human nature, that boys of all ages, and men too, cannot resist the temptation of hunting and persecuting those pretty creatures whenever they catch sight of them. Such, however, is their activity, that unless beset by overwhelming numbers they generally succeed in eluding their persecutors. Indeed, without a gun it is almost impossible to obtain possession of an adult squirrel; and even when the hunter has the advantage of fire-arms, the sharp-sighted and nimble little climbers generally contrive to keep the trunk or boughs of a tree between them and their pursuers, so that it is no easy matter to secure the chance of a shot. Their movements in running along the limbs and branches are extremely rapid, but still more remarkable is their activity in leaping from bough to bough or from one tree to another even across considerable intervals. In these gymnastic performances they seldom miss their aim, and if they chance to do so, they almost invariably catch some projecting twig in their fall, and thus save themselves from coming to the ground, and pursue their course not at all disconcerted by the mishap. But even should they fall from a considerable height, either through missing their hold in leaping, or being violently dislodged, they contrive in their descent so to spread out their limbs and expanded tail as to offer the greatest resistance to the air, and thus come to the ground as lightly as possible and escape unhurt. Trees are the natural home of almost all the family, and their structure is admirably fitted for their woodland haunts and mode of life.

They belong to an extensive natural order, Rodentia, which has already been described in former notices of natural history in this journal. The tribe or family of the squirrel is very extensive, comprising a number of species, and being very generally distributed over the globe. They are nowhere more numerous or common than in North America, though like all wild animals they fast diminish and almost disappear from the neighborhood of men. The most common species in Canada are the three represented in the accompanying engraving, the Red Squirrel, the

Black Squirrel, and the Ground Squirrel or Chipmunk. Every one will recognize them in the illustration, without any special figures or references.

The generic name of the family, *Sciurus*, is of Greek derivation, and signifies shadow-tail, in allusion to the length and expanse of this member, and its habit of arching it over its back. Of the Canadian varieties the Red Squirrel (*Sciurus Hudsonius*) is the most common. It very closely resembles the English species in general appearance and coloring, but is somewhat smaller. The common characteristics of all the squirrels, by which they are distinguished from other members of the same natural order, are well marked in this pretty and sprightly little animal. These distinctive peculiarities are—slender,

reddish brown above, with scattered darker hairs, and on the under part of the body white. Traces of a dark line are generally observable along the flanks. The tail on the upper surface is of the same color as the body, with blackish hairs on the border; on the under side, rufous in the middle, then black and tipped with brown. The total length of the body is about eight inches, of the tail, including the fur, six inches and a half.

This graceful little animal is very generally distributed over the North American continent, and is found from the Arctic circle, or 65° north latitude, to the mountainous ranges of North Carolina and Tennessee. It possesses in a marked degree the lively disposition and activity of its tribe. Its gambols, when

at liberty in the woods, are most amusing, and its gymnastic performances truly surprising. It approaches nearer to man's abode than any other species, and indeed is the only variety that is at all frequently found near human dwellings. A pair of these creatures had their quarters, a year ago, close by the house of the writer, and seemed to be very partial to the snow apples in the orchard, many of which bore traces of their little teeth, though their principal subsistence consisted, during spring and summer, of the young buds of trees, and in the autumn and winter of the horse-chestnuts and acorns of which there happened to be an abundant supply close to the house. During the warm months squirrels are frequently abroad in the cool of the day, in quest of food, or pursuing their active gambols among the branches, or uttering those sharp chattering notes,



elongated body, small rounded head, large, brilliant eyes, erect ears, the upper lip slightly divided, the hinder longer than the fore-legs, the feet furnished with long, slender distinct toes, four on each fore-foot and five on the hinder, the fore-foot being also provided with a tubercle covered with an obtuse nail in place of a thumb, eight teats, two pectoral and the rest ventral, tail long and bushy, more or less distichous, that is, having the fur divergent in opposite directions from the central line. The teeth are constructed like those of all the order, the four incisors, or cutting teeth, being specially adapted for gnawing hard substances, such as nut-shells and the hard coats of seeds. The ears of the Red Squirrel, though covered at the back with long and projecting hairs, are seldom tufted like those of the English squirrel. The color of the fur is subject to considerable variety, but most commonly it is of a deep,

which have suggested one of the familiar names of this species, Chick-a-dee. Though classed among the hibernating animals, they are not completely dormant during the winter, yet they undoubtedly pass much of their time in sleep; but occasionally on warm days one or two may be seen to venture forth from their snug retreat. With provident instinct the little creature lays by an ample store of provision for the winter, hiding its food in various places, either in the hollows of trees or in sheltered nooks about the roots and elsewhere, and apparently possesses a very retentive memory as to the locality of its granaries or hiding places. The next species in the illustration is the largest of Canadian squirrels, and not uncommon in the less settled districts. This is the Black Squirrel (*S. niger*), which is easily distinguished by the uniformly jet black hue of its fur, even the under parts of its body being of the same tinge. It