

THE BEHAVIOUR OF THE RED SQUIRREL.

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For the past eight months, that is from October to May inclusive, I have had a male Red Squirrel (*Sciurus hudsonicus loquax*), under almost daily observation. The conditions for acquiring information on the normal behaviour of this species have been practically ideal. This squirrel is not tame and I have purposely refrained from any efforts to render it so, since conclusions drawn from the actions of a tame animal are of very doubtful value when applied to the species in the wild state. It has made its headquarters in a large sugar maple tree which grows beside the house, the main limbs of which are on a level with, and close to, my second-story verandah, while the tips of the branches are on a level with a window on the third story.

The reason why the squirrel selected this tree as its headquarters is not far to seek, as last year this maple produced an exceedingly bountiful crop of keys, which were lying thickly on the ground beneath it and on the roof, while all the other trees in the vicinity are soft maples whose keys had long ago germinated.

FOOD.

The main natural source of food supply of the squirrel has been the keys of the sugar maple; the second most important has been the buds of both soft and sugar maple. During April it consumed considerable quantities of buds, first of the soft maple and later, when the buds of the latter species had expanded, turning its attention to those of the sugar maple. After the leaves of the sugar maple were about one-third expanded it cut off a good many of the four-leaved sprays and ate the tender young stem, allowing the leaves to fall to the ground.

At the end of March, when the sap was flowing from broken twigs of the sugar maple and running down the under-side of the branches, the squirrel devoted most of its time to drinking sap. In order to get at this sap it had in most cases to hang upside-down, in the manner shown in Figure 1. When thus hanging from a small branch both fore and hind feet were clasped about the branch so that the toes nearly met on top of the branch. When hanging from a large limb its position looked a good deal more precarious, but it maintained its hold with ease and certainty, and though I saw it thus suspended from large limbs over a hundred times I never saw a single slip. When in this position it relied chiefly on its hind legs, and there was a decided bend outward in these legs at the tarsal joint, this bend evidently enabling the claws to catch the crevices of the bark more effectively.

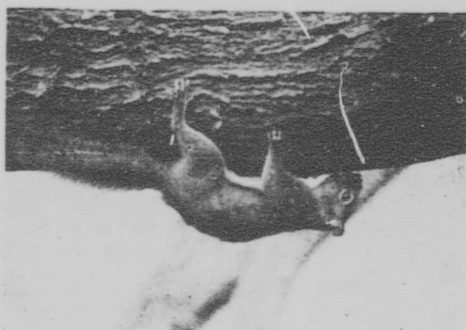


Fig. 1—Squirrel in position assumed when drinking sap.

When drinking sap it laps it up, its tongue going at a tremendous rate.

I have tried the squirrel with many different articles of food, such as meat, vegetables and nuts. For green vegetables, such as cabbage and celery, it has no great fondness. It likes meat, but its favorite food is undoubtedly nuts—hazels, walnuts, beechnuts and hickories. It also relishes sweet substances, as candy and jam.

MANNER OF EATING.

When eating anything which can be picked up it invariably takes it between its fore-paws, and sits up in the position shown in Figure 2. The position



Fig. 2—Squirrel in characteristic eating attitude