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A Species That Haunts Only The Deepest Woods.

In the forests of northern Louisiana and south-western Arkansas the black squirrel is found in considerable numbers. It is not believed that the little animal is to be met with elsewhere in this country save in isolated instances.

Forty years ago it was common enough in the upper States of the middle West; fifty years ago it inhabited Virginia, West Virginia and southern Pennsylvania, and seventy-five years ago it was killed often in western New York. Its disappearance from its northern ranges and concentration in this comparatively unsettled part of the world has puzzled naturalists, yet the explanation is simple.

Of all squirrels the black is the most secretive. It dislikes the light. It is happy only when in deepest, darkest, thickest woods. Its color fits it best for concealment in shadows.

It is not friendly or sociable. It does not consort with other members of its tribe. It is not a squirrel of civilization. It does not frequent trees close to houses; nobody can make a pet of it; it is savage and solitary.

It retreated before the advancing settlements as the wild pigeon retreated, and as the prairie chicken is retreating. As the woods were felled and dark places cleared up it went southward. It was not a good migrant and many perished as they went. Like the red Indian, it numbers now only a thousandth part of its former multitudes. Within the century it will become extinct.

There are still forests in America, but except in the Lake Superior region, where the squirrel does not exist, and near Puget Sound they are of pine and the black squirrel does not live in the pine lands. Those trees are too far apart and there is too much light among them.

The home of this beautiful species is confined to swamps and semi-swamps where the boles are within four feet of each other and the branches interlock and thick vines clamber and Spanish moss waves like massive gray beards. Unlike the northern squirrel, it never builds its nest in the forks of branches but always in hollow trees, where only a snake is able to get at its young, and it is not a roamer.

It will pass its life within a mile of the place where it was born. A black squirrel seen in a tree one day will be found within a hundred yards of that tree on the following day and for many days to come.

These squirrels are not as active as the gray or the fox squirrel, trusting for protection almost wholly to their ability to hide. They show a rare skill in selecting shelter and are difficult to dislodge.

A gray squirrel will get on the side of a tree opposite to a man, peer around the trunk curiously and shift all day as he shifts. A branch shaken vigorously or a stick rapped against the base of a tree will start it flying.

Two men by taking each a side of a tree may thus slay the gray squirrel without trouble, but the black chooses a point high up, where it will be hidden, save for the tip of one erect ear, or a waving tail, and will lie there to be shot at for an hour without moving a muscle. Once it has found an ambush of this kind the hunter can go up the tree after it or he can let it alone.

There is no squirrel which is so hard to see. Many of the trunks of swamp trees are nearly black and against their bark this animal is practically indistinguishable. Darting up a trunk with great rapidity, it will stop suddenly and listen out. A waving branch intervenes for a moment and the man with the gun has lost his game.

His only chance then is to secrete himself and watch patiently that part of the trees in which he fancies the quarry is hiding. After a half hour he may be rewarded by seeing an apparent knot, excrescence or piece of smooth bark detach itself and move cautiously upward.

Among squirrel hunters who choose sides for a prize the gray counts for five points the fox for twenty five and the black for fifty. This valuation is put on it not because it is scarce, but because it is difficult to find and kill.

It increases here because it is little hunted. The negroes let it alone because they regard it with the superstition with which they honor a black cat or a black hen. Because the squirrel lives in the deep of swamps, never visits the fields, is not often seen in sunlight and is ebony from nose to tail tip, they give it partnership with the evil one.

If a negro driving a wagon into a swamp for a load of wood sees a black squirrel lope across the dim road, he will turn back. His reasons for this are twofold: He is afraid of the squirrel and would like to postpone hauling the wood.

The black squirrel, despite assertion to the contrary, is not a freak as is the white

Scrofula

What is commonly inherited is not scrofula but the scrofulous disposition. This is generally and chiefly indicated by cutaneous eruptions; sometimes by pale-ness, nervousness and general debility.

The disease afflicted Mrs. K. T. Snyder, Union St., Troy, Ohio, when she was eighteen years old, manifesting itself by a bunch in her neck, which caused great pain, was lanced, and became a running sore.

It afflicted the daughter of Mrs. J. H. Jones, Parker City, Ind., when 18 years old, and developed so rapidly that when she was 18 she had eleven running sores on her neck and about her ears.

These sufferers were not benefited by professional treatment, but, as they voluntarily say, were completely cured by

Hood's Sarsaparilla

This peculiar medicine positively corrects the scrofulous disposition and radically and permanently cures the disease.

squirrel and all other albinos. It is a distinct species, and mates and brings forth from three to five pups as black as itself. There have been many instances of the fox squirrel's mixing with the grays but the black never mixes.

It is not found in droves and the presence of one in any part of the woods is no guarantee that there are others near. Most likely there are not. The male associates with the female only in the breeding season and deserts her as soon as mating is completed, returning to its solitary life in its own chosen bailiwick.

It is pugnacious, but its combats are confined almost wholly to its own kind. Whenever a male black is shot the skin will be found to bear scars too many to count, and the older it is the more scars it will bear. Their fights are thought to be due largely to accidental meetings.

Being solitary they dislike intrusion, and each male fancies that the other is invading his territory. They battle savagely also in the mating season, and when engaged may be approached and knocked over with a fishing pole. The weaker is almost always killed.

The black squirrel is genuinely a beautiful animal when in condition. The fur is exceedingly glossy and shines brilliantly when bar of sunlight falls on it. The under hair is of fine texture and the skin when well dressed makes handsome caps, muffs and so forth.

In hunting the black squirrel most of the rules for taking squirrels must be reversed. It will not for instance do the hunter any good to take a seat upon a log near sundown and keep still, waiting for its quarry to show itself. When a foe is around its sole desire is to hide and stay hidden until danger is past.

It has no curiosity to speak of, and does not waste time in tempting fate by peering around a tree. The hunter must be silent and slow, surveying the ground and foliage ahead carefully. He must know the trees affected by the squirrel and the parts of the trees in which it is apt to be found.

This will depend upon the time of day. Early in the morning and late in the afternoon it will be feeding and will probably be near the top of some oak or swamp hickory. In the middle of the day it will be lying flat upon some large limb, or will be curled in its hollow asleep.

It is well to remember that within fifty yards of any tree in which it may be found there is a hollow to which it will get immediately if it can. Consequently if the hunter sees a black squirrel feeding at some distance away, or hears it chipping nuts or acorns, he will do well to find the hollow and remain as close to it as possible when aiming the game.

There are but two ways of finding this squirrel: By eyesight in stealthily, or by ear in bearing it feeding. The black squirrel in changing its place goes down one side of a trunk idly and slyly, rap buries across the intervening ground and runs up the other trunk in silence. It seldom leaps unless obliged to, but if the branches of the trees interlace it will make its way for a hundred yards scarcely disturbing a leaf or stirring a bough with its weight.

Against this squirrel the rifle is almost useless. It is not often that a fair shot may be had. It cannot be led into showing its head by any ordinary artifice; it will not shift slowly around a tree until its body is exposed and so permit the barking shot which consists in driving a ball between the belly and bark and in killing the animal with shock.

It is an adept at getting solid wood between itself and its firemen and keeping it there. It is to be killed mainly only when it is first seen and starts toward its hollow refuge.

It is swift on its feet, though not a far leaper, and as it darts along the limbs its lithe black body, dimly seen through the shadows and leaves, offers no easy target even for a 12 gauge. That gun with No. 6 shot is about the only weapon worth having when black squirrels are wanted.

The animal will not be exposed to view for more than a yard at any time and the shot must be instantly made, frequently at a hard angle and frequently with many twigs intervening. There are men, who rather fancy themselves in the open when the pointer stands rigid and the quails buzz in air, who make but a poor showing snap shooting in semi-lighted woods with a half visible mark scooting along a limb.

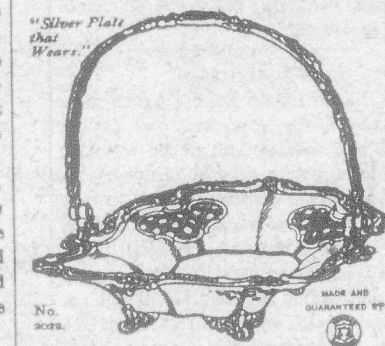


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