



Those Darn Squirrels

Squirrels. If you feed birds, then you are well-acquainted with these furry feeder raiders. Perhaps too well-acquainted. Holes in your feeders, pounds of seeds on the ground and in their bellies, squirrels are the nemesis of many a bird lover.

But there is hope! You really can defeat these wily creatures by taking some simple steps involving baffles and correct seed and feeder choices. It's that simple. And, your expenses will quickly be recovered in seed savings.

PLACEMENT & Baffles

A baffle is simply a device designed to keep a squirrel (or raccoon) from climbing the pole, or descending the feeder wire, to reach the birdseed.

A baffle will prevent upward and downward movement, but keep in mind that squirrels can jump 4-5' vertically, leap 10-12' horizontally. They are determined!

So, the first step is to place your feeding station far enough away from trees, deck rails, fence posts, etc., to keep the squirrels from simply leaping on to the feeder. Once that's done you can put a baffle on your pole and you'll be all set to simply enjoy your birds.

Put a baffle on every pole you use. Trust us: they'll find the one pole that does not have a deterrent. Pole baffles attach to the pole using a clamp and are shaped like a disk, cone or torpedo. If using a cone or disk baffle, make sure your feeders do not hang below the top of the baffle. Larger baffles will keep raccoons from raiding your feeders at night.

There are also baffles for 4x4" posts that are mounted to the post using brackets and screws.

Mount the baffle so the top is at least 5' from the ground. Remember, squirrels can jump 4-5 feet!

If you want to hang a feeder from a tree or deck rail, you'll want to try a dome-shaped



grey squirrel

hanging baffle, usually made of heavy-duty plastic or metal. The baffle should tilt a little bit rather than remaining stationary or rigid, so that it tilts when a squirrel leaps on it, causing the squirrel to slide off. The baffle diameter should be at least 14", with a metal chain and hook under it from which the feeder hangs. Keeping squirrels from descending on to a baffle is harder than

keeping them from climbing a post or pole to reach the baffle, but can be done. A better alternative would be to purchase a trusted squirrel-resistant feeder.

Baffling Your Squirrels

It's actually quite simple:

1) Place feeding station 10-12' from any leaping-off point.

2) Mount a baffle on the post or pole. Top must be 5' off the ground and feeders should not hang below baffle.



A large, torpedo-style baffle will deter squirrels and raccoons.



An All Seasons'
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Chickadee on weight-sensitive Squirrel Buster Plus
photo by Don Curle

FEEDER TYPE

Most squirrel-resistant feeders use weight sensitive mechanisms or electric shocks to deter the squirrels. There's also a weight-sensitive feeder powered by a rechargeable battery that spins the bottom of the feeder to fling off the squirrel. The nice thing about these feeders is that they can be hung in any location without a baffle. They're a perfect choice for hanging from a deck or roofline.

Weight-sensitive feeders come in various sizes and use springs or counter-weights to close the feeder or collapse the perches when anything heavier than a bird sits on it.

Electric shock feeders give the squirrels an annoying little zap when

they touch two conducting points. It doesn't harm the squirrel but it is annoying to them and they'll quickly learn to leave the feeder alone. These feeders do not shock the birds and come in a solar-powered or battery-powered models.

With any squirrel-resistant feeder the squirrels will continually try to access the feeder for a week or so before giving up. And, they'll realize when the batteries are low, so be sure to keep your feeder charged if you go with a battery option.

BIRDSEED CHOICES

There are actually some seeds that squirrels don't like. Not many, but there are some and you can use these seeds in feeders without baffles - even hanging them in your trees for your birds to enjoy.

Safflower and Golden Safflower (NutraSaff™) are enjoyed by most birds, especially cardinals. Fortunately, squirrels typically do not like the slightly bitter taste

of safflower while the birds, with fewer taste buds, enjoy it. Nyjer™ seed is another seed that squirrels typically do not eat, so you can safely hang finch feeders (containing only Nyjer™ seed, not a finch mix) in your trees.

Of course, squirrels are curious and every now and then a new squirrel will chew a hole in the tube to see what's inside.

You can also use a pepper mix called "Squirrel Away" on any bird seed. Again, the birds have fewer taste buds and can't taste the pepper, but the squirrels can. An effective way to apply the hot pepper mix is to lightly coat the seed with an oil spray so that the pepper adheres better to the seed. If you use suet and don't want to use baffles, there are hot pepper cakes and plugs that are effective in keeping the squirrels at bay.



red squirrel photo by Minnetonka customer Damon Swanson

Know Your Enemy

Now that you know how to co-exist with these furred creatures, you can enjoy watching them and learn more about their habits.

Worldwide, there are more than 365 species of squirrels, but the species we're most familiar with in Minnesota

are Eastern Grey Squirrels, Eastern Fox Squirrels, Red Squirrels and two species of flying squirrels.

Eastern Grey Squirrels are the most common backyard squirrel. They're 15-20" long and grey to greyish brown.

Fox Squirrels are larger than grey squirrels and have more of an orange

tint to their coats, but otherwise look and act similar to a grey squirrel.

Of note: if you see white or black squirrels, those are color variations of the Eastern Grey Squirrel. A grey squirrel litter may contain all three colors!

The tinier Red Squirrel is perhaps more annoying to people than other squirrels, simply because of its gnawing habits. Most people have them in their garage or shed at some point.

Their name comes from their fur color: a deep orange-red, with a smooth creamy belly and a distinctive white ring around their eyes. Their territory is smaller than grey and fox squirrels, seldom more than 400 feet in range.

Red Squirrels also are more vocal, emitting a high-pitched chatter when perturbed.

Grey, red and fox

squirrels are most active two to three hours after sunrise and again two hours before sunset.

All of these squirrels breed twice a year, having 2-8 young in each litter. The first litter is born in late February/early March, the second litter is born in July.

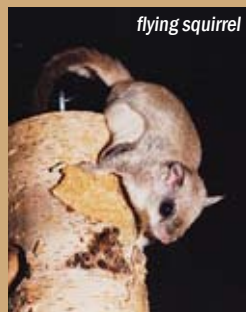
Two other squirrely birdseed bandits are the Northern Flying Squirrel, which ranges across central and northern Minnesota, and the Southern Flying Squirrel, found in the lower third of the state. Both species are found in the Metro area, with the Northern Flying

Squirrel being more common in the northern suburbs.

These squirrels don't really fly, but glide on air currents using a flap of loose skin that connects its front and hind legs almost like a parachute. Because they are nocturnal, people seldom notice them.



fox squirrel



flying squirrel