



How squirrel smart are you?

We see squirrels all the time (not running and leaping in the trees, digging in the ground, playing chase). Have you been watching closely? Take this squirrel smart quiz then go out and watch some squirrels to find out just how "squirrel smart" you are. Add your own questions if you think of new ones.



Fill in your guess (hypothesis) in the first column. Write your observations in the second column. Do they match? Why or why not?

Squirrel Smart Quiz

Question	Hypothesis	Observation
How does a squirrel move on the ground: walk, run, leap?	_____	_____
How does a squirrel climb a tree: straight up, zig-zag, spiral?	_____	_____
How does a squirrel climb down a tree: head first, tail first?	_____	_____
Do squirrels have claws?	_____	_____
Do squirrels make noises?	_____	_____
<i>Add your own questions</i>	Hypothesis	Observation
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

How did you do? Were you able to learn something new about squirrels?

If you enjoyed watching squirrels, you might try putting some seeds or nuts outside near a window for more interesting watching. You could even build an obstacle course for them to go through to get the food. You can test the squirrels to find out just how smart **THEY** are!



nature discovery center teachers' corner

Squirrels, Squirrels, Squirrels

By Jean Matka

Squirrels seem to be everywhere in the fall of year - tearing around in the trees, making leaf with nesting cups from pine needles, making a sound as they scamper sniffing out nuts and seeds or perched on a branch pulling the nut out of its pine cone to get at the seeds. We may not be their ally and even chide at their antics, but we rarely realize they can be wonderful subjects for children to observe and learn from. Get with the Nature Kids for more squirrel observation facts.

In Houston, we have three species of squirrels.



Southern Flying Squirrel

Small enough to hold in your hand, the flying squirrel is our only nocturnal, arboreal (night) member of the squirrel family. It has a furry membrane that stretches from wrist to ankle. It glides rather than truly flying and steers by manipulating its tail and wrists.



Eastern Gray Squirrel

Probably the most common squirrel here, this is the squirrel you see waving "dresses" up and down tree trunks. They are brown and grey above and white beneath. Gray squirrels eat a variety of nuts and seeds. They are most active in the morning and late afternoon.



Fox Squirrel

This is the largest of our local squirrels. It is sometimes called a "red squirrel" because of its reddish coat. It has a heavier build than the Eastern Gray Squirrel, tends to move more slowly and spends more time on the ground. It buries its nuts in hoards or caches, rather than singly like the gray squirrel.

Squirrels are members of the order Rodentia, the largest group of mammals with over 1500 species worldwide, ranging in size from the 2 ounce harvest mouse to the 748 pound capybara. They are characterized by continuously growing incisors (front teeth), two in the top jaw and two in the bottom. These teeth continue to grow and use to wear them down as they gnaw.

There are three groups of rodents: mouse-like rodents, porcupine-like rodents, and squirrel-like rodents (our squirrels). Squirrels and their close relatives have four toes on each front foot and five on each hind foot. Except for the flying squirrels, they are all ground-dwelling in the daytime.

Getting started observing squirrels with children

Try these ideas or begin with the investigation on the Nature Kids page.

Investigations can begin with a simple question or you can brainstorm with your child several questions you can answer through observation.

Do squirrels use their front paws to help them eat? If so, how?

What kinds of sounds do squirrels make?

How do they behave when they are "talking"?

Add your questions to the list on the Nature Kids page.

One good resource for other ideas is *Wild World Squirrels* by Frank Graham.

