



Auburn Squirrel Project

2019 – 2020



Photo taken by Sarah Wilson

The Auburn Squirrel Project began in September 2019 as a dissertation chapter by Sarah Wilson, an Auburn University graduate student under the advisement of Drs. Steve Dobson and Todd Steury. We hoped to learn more about the effects of local winter conditions on the scatterhoarding behavior of eastern gray squirrels.



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Volunteers found squirrels in their backyards, local parks, or nearby forests and recorded behavioral observations for 10 minutes. Squirrels have been watched for a total of 10,889 hours by our volunteers. This would have taken our graduate student 1.2 years of nothing but watching squirrels to gain the same amount of data!

We gained a large network of volunteers around the United States who enjoy learning new things about this common backyard species!

A special thank you to our Top 5 Squirrel Watchers:

1. Cynthia W.- 232 squirrels
2. Patty L.- 56 squirrels
3. Jennifer K.- 43 squirrels
4. Brooke R.- 41 squirrels
5. Amy W.- 40 squirrels

Countless teachers also included our project in their curriculums which resulted in over 350 students gaining experience in data collection and analysis!

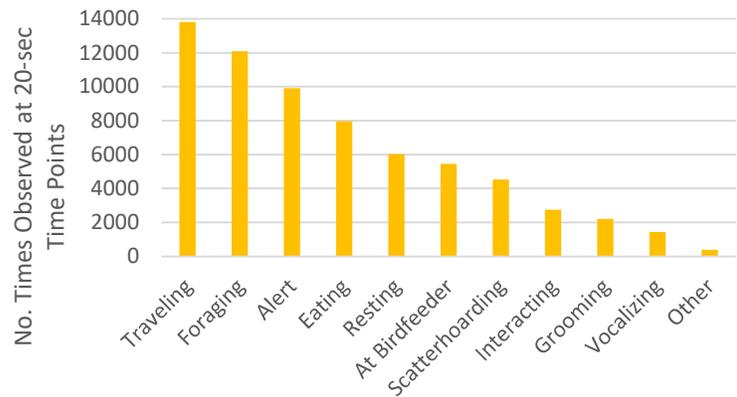
We have data from 2574 squirrels (locations shown on map) that were watched by 486 volunteers since September 2019!



Our biggest interest for this project is scatterhoarding behavior. We expected squirrels to be scatterhoarding just as much in spring as they are in fall, though our volunteers seem to be seeing differences between the seasons, with more squirrels seen scatterhoarding during fall than spring. See the table below for these numbers broken down for the four seasons we have watched squirrels for during this project! Squirrels were seen scatterhoarding 4,527 food items since the start of observations.

Season	Total # of squirrels observed	# of squirrels observed scatterhoarding	% of squirrels observed scatterhoarding
Fall 2019	421	127	0.30
Spring 2020	441	69	0.16
Summer 2020	120	7	0.06
Fall 2020	725	725	0.46

Squirrels were recorded in-sight over 66,000 times throughout the project, so far. They spent most of their time moving around, looking for food, watching for predators, and eating.



Interesting “other” behaviors reported included drinking from birdbaths, eating fruit from trees, chewing on a skull, and rolling in the dirt.



Photo submitted by Cindy W. in SC

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