

GETTING TO KNOW WILDLIFE

Motherhood for Squirrels is a Demanding Job



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The female squirrels that were seen resting on the fence rail at the Wildlife Centre during June were looking pretty tuckered out. It was no wonder, after caring for up to five babies over the late winter and spring months.

The eastern Grey Squirrel has her babies as early as March and in our climate that presents a real challenge. The female must find a secure spot when her newborn babies are only as big as your thumb and subject to be preyed upon by crows. The typical tree nests or dreys afford no protection at that time of year due to the lack of leaf cover.

A second litter is born in July and August when the weather is less harsh but still female squirrels are looking for safe spots, such as a soffit or shed that offers protection

from predators and the elements when babies are most vulnerable.

There are fewer babies born during the summer. We speculate it is because they are born to adults who were themselves born late in the season the year before. The care of the young is the sole responsibility of the mother, and she is very devoted.

We would sometimes get calls from people concerned about squirrels with hair loss. When it was confirmed that the hair loss was around the squirrel's shoulders and upper back, we were able to assure people it was quite natural. Mother squirrels will pluck their hair and use it to line the nest as warm insulation for tiny babies.

You can always tell a mother squirrel with 'teenagers' because her hair will have started to come back in and the short new growth will often be a different shade. It appears that

the squirrel is wearing a dark 'vest' with lighter 'pants'.

Most likely the squirrels you see around your property at this time are females with babies close by. Trapping and relocating adult squirrels is never humane as they don't do well in a new territory. It is also a death sentence for the babies that are left behind to suffer and die of starvation.

The babies mature quickly; developing hair by three weeks. Their eyes open by four weeks and by nine weeks, they are venturing out of the nest with mother. By 12 weeks they are quite independent although the summer litter will often den with their siblings over the winter.

If squirrels have taken up temporary residence in a soffit or attic, once they leave in mid to late September, you can do the animal-proofing. Check out the website below for detailed help.