

by Emily George

Remarks on the Opening of Squirrel Season in Virginia - A hunter's awakenings



Stalking squirrels in the woods is the ideal way to introduce the inexperienced to the outdoors and hunting; it's also an underrated challenge for seasoned hunters. This foundational activity has all the ingredients that make a wise hunter, and a brace of squirrels provide delicious fare for your table.

Squirrel hunting should be the first activity to pursue when introducing youth or the inexperienced to the outdoors and hunting. It's engaging, it's educational, and it's definitely stress-relieving. Nothing beats listening to the wind whirl through the tree tops of the forest while looking for a bushy tail on a late-afternoon hunt.

Squirrel hunting (in this case Eastern Gray Squirrel - *Sciurus carolinensis*) is active because it requires walking, listening, and stalking squirrels in their habitat. They are abundant and move quickly. When they spot you, they're gone. You must be quiet and camouflaged when trying to sneak-up on a squirrel. They move a lot, which means you'll likely have to. And when it's time to shoot, they don't pause for long. You need to pull the trigger as soon as you aim the gun at your target.

If you've never been hunting, then the deer stand is probably not the best place to start. Squirrel hunting will probably not be attractive to the modern hunter because it's not hunting for a trophy class buck or a banded pintail, but it is the foundational activity that makes a wise hunter. We need wise, experienced hunters who have made the woods their second home. Hunting squirrels requires a lot of walking, stalking, patience, persistence, determination, and eagerness to learn and understand the

by Emily George

woods. All of these combined is what makes a great overall hunter. It creates a skilled woodsman.

All of these components are vital for hunting any type of wild game, from ducks to deer and bear. Squirrel hunting ultimately teaches marksmanship, woodsmanship, firearm safety, hunting ethics, and how to clean and prepare game.

Squirrel hunting can be tough, which is what makes it fun. We all need to be challenged- that is what makes hunting what it is. Squirrels can easily spot you, and they're gone as soon as they see you. It's important to move quietly through the woods while looking for them.

Know where to look for them before going into the woods. During the spring, they may be higher in the trees feeding on buds. During the fall, they're usually found near mast-producing oaks scrounging for winter forage.

For a more challenging hunt, try hunting fox squirrels in the mountains. They're wiler, smarter, bigger, and are found on the ground more frequently than in trees.

When compared to other types of hunting like waterfowl or big game, squirrels are relatively more affordable. It doesn't require much equipment like tree-stands or a trail camera, or heavy, mandatory hunting clothing like waders, which can get pricey. Squirrel hunting simply requires lightweight camouflage and a small gun like a varmint rifle such as a .22, which means cheaper ammunition and little equipment expenses.

Despite the presumption of eating squirrel, this small game makes delicious fare and they are simple to skin and clean. Squirrel casserole with stuffing and sautéed vegetables is my personal favorite. But the list is endless. And, you don't need to reach a harvest limit of squirrels to be able to have enough meat for a meal. Get outdoors, take someone who has never been, and get after some squirrels this season. It's different than hunting deer. It's a breath of fresh air, literally.

Editor's Note: Here are two squirrel recipes from Wade Truong and Rachel Owen's *Elevated Wild* website. The warm and restorative Vietnamese chao soup, using squirrel instead of the traditional chicken, will surprise your friends; also the verjus & sumac squirrel (which is easier to prepare than it sounds). To learn more about squirrel hunting: *Squirrel Hunting Myths and Facts* and *5 Reasons Why You Should Be Squirrel Hunting* - and then get out into the woods!

Banner Photo: Eastern Gray Squirrel (Sciurus carolinensis) Eating. Courtesy Virginia Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries

This article was published on June 8 by ShoreDailyNews.com (provided by the Virginia Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries). Republished with permission