

[From Spring 2000]

DELMARVA Fox Squirrel Study Begins !!!

Refuge staff and volunteers conducted the annual box check for the Delmarva Peninsula fox (DFS) squirrel on Monday, January 31st. Eighteen people, staff and volunteers, checked 138 boxes. Representatives were present from Maryland Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit (Univ. of Maryland-Eastern Shore), Ecological Services Chesapeake Bay Field Office, Patuxent Research Refuge, DFS recovery team, and Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge (CNWR) staff and volunteers. As part of my master's project, boxes were also checked on February 2nd and 11th, with additional volunteers from Eastern Shore NWR. A total of 61 squirrels were captured.

A different tagging technique was implemented this year during the box checks at one study site. All DFS squirrels captured on the Woodland Trail study site received both ear tags and PIT (passive integrated transponders) tags. PIT tags measure 12mm x 2mm and were placed subcutaneously (under the skin) at the base of the tail using a 12 gauge needle. PIT tags emit electromagnetic signals when activated by a scanner and have a life span of 99 years. They work by using the same technology that is used in grocery or retail stores to record the price of merchandise as it is scanned at the checkout.

Thirty-one squirrels received PIT tags during the box checks. On the last night of the box checks, a female with two young was found in the box. She had previously been ear tagged and PIT tagged.

Refuge biological staff and interns will continue the benchmark monitoring of the DFS this spring as trapping begins on March 13th. Each of the trapping locations is marked with a PVC pipe, painted orange, that has been driven into the ground. All squirrel areas will be prebaited for five days and trapped for three.

In addition to ear tagging and PIT tagging, as part of my study, squirrels in each study site (Woodland Trail, Lighthouse Ridge, Wildlife Loop, and White Hills) will receive radio collars. Readings will be taken on all squirrels several times a week. The study is scheduled to conclude in May 2001.

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