

[From Spring 1994]

A Rude Awakening for a Head Count

As part of a continuing program to manage and monitor the Chincoteague refuge's population of the endangered Delmarva Peninsula fox squirrel (*Sciurus niger cinereus*), the annual nest box check was conducted on February 10th from 8:00 pm. until 12:30 am. Chincoteague Refuge staff and volunteers along with biologists from the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Virginia Museum of Natural History, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, students from the Eastern Shore Community College and other Service biologists braved the cold, wet night to check over 100 boxes in five different management areas on the refuge. Because of the extremely wet conditions later in the evening, a second check was performed by refuge staff and volunteers on February 14th from 7:00 pm until 4:00 am to complete the box check in two remote areas.

The results of this year's box check was the best ever recorded since the first check in 1977. A record 59 squirrels were recorded in boxes from the Woodland Trail, Wildlife Loop, Lighthouse Ridge and White Hills nest box management areas. For the first time in three years, no squirrels were recorded on the Sow Pond management area. The Woodland Trail, as in past years, continued to be the area where squirrels were most abundant, with 34 squirrels found in 16 boxes. Some boxes had as many as three squirrels sleeping together to stay warm. During the box check last year, 52 squirrels were found in the same five management areas.

As part of the box check, very sleepy squirrels are removed from the box, ear tagged, weighed, sex and age determined, and placed back into the box. This information is used by refuge biologists to determine longevity, reproduction and general health of the fox squirrels to better manage the population in the years to come.

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