

[From Spring 1998]

Rude Awakening!

Imagine being warm and cozy in your bed of oak leaves and pine needles when all of the sudden there is a knock at your door. You come out only to find yourself in a bag. After being gently handled you are calmly returned to your warm bed none the worse for wear. Delmarva fox squirrels have this experience every winter at the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge.

During the cold winter months, Delmarva fox squirrels use nest boxes as shelter, and later to raise their young. In late January and early February, refuge personnel and volunteers conducted nest box checks. Temperatures stayed in the low 40s. Although not optimal conditions, 41 squirrels were still recorded, compared to 38 squirrels in 1997. Of the 41, 13 had been previously tagged. Twenty-three of the 41 squirrels were males and 14 were females - 4 escaped before they could be checked. Only three juvenile squirrels were recorded, all others were adults.

Along with squirrels, refuge personnel also found Northern flickers, bee hives, and a screech owl egg in the nest boxes. However, no gray squirrels were found.

In previous years, nest boxes were removed due to the southern pine beetle infestation of loblolly pine trees. Since then, many of the boxes have been replaced. Refuge personnel and volunteers have planted hard-woods in the affected areas. In the future, they will provide the endangered Delmarva fox squirrel and other wildlife species with a more diverse habitat and food source.

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