

[From Summer 1999]

Why Did the Squirrel Cross the Road?

We have no idea!! Not really the answer you wanted to hear, but an honest one. Most of you probably know that Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge harbors a rather small, gray four-footed creature with a huge fuzzy gray tail. This creature is commonly known as the Delmarva Peninsula Fox Squirrel.

The fox squirrel (or DFS) that occurs on the refuge is different than the squirrel you may see in your back yard. It ranges in color from a very pale gray to black. It is larger and prefers to spend more time on the ground than other squirrels. The DFS feeds on loblolly pine cone seeds, nuts, fungi and berries.

Unfortunately, the DFS also likes to run across the refuge entrance road. Every year a number of squirrels are killed in their attempt to cross. Several measures are being implemented to help alleviate this problem. New, larger warning signs have been posted to alert visitors to the presence of the squirrel. Also rumble strips have been placed slightly before each sign to further alert visitors. Fliers with the same information will also be handed out at the fee booth. An exhibit is being put together regarding the squirrel and its life history.

There are many unanswered questions regarding the Delmarva Peninsula Fox squirrel. I will soon try to answer a few of these questions by examining southern pine beetle damaged areas to determine if a correlation exists between the size of the cuts and the presence or absence of squirrels.

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