



December - Week 4

Squirrels in Winter

Winter is a great time to focus on the life of squirrels. While many animals have either migrated to a warmer climate or dozed off into a deep sleep, squirrels remain active throughout the winter in Minnesota. In the fall gray squirrels were busy stashing food away for the winter. They buried nuts such as black walnuts and acorns for safe storage so they can dig them up throughout the winter.

Red squirrels on the other hand, prefer to eat the seeds of evergreens which are found within cones high in the branches of spruce and pines. They have access to those cones throughout the winter, climbing the trees and chewing on the cones, eating the seeds while leaving a pile of cone shavings in the snow below. These signs signal a squirrel's "dining room" called a midden.

Observe the squirrels in your yard, schoolyard, or local woodlands. Are you observing red, gray, or both species of squirrels? What do you notice the squirrels doing? If there is snow on the ground and you find squirrel tracks, follow them. Where do they lead, to a tree? If so, look for a drey (a leafy nest in the tree branches) or a tree cavity they may use as a winter home. Do you find snow, leaves, or dirt dug up along the squirrel trail? If so, why do you think they dug there? What evidence (if any) do you find? Do you find a pile of cone scraps? Who left those behind? Do you see squirrels visiting some bird feeders? Have they found a way to get on a feeder? In your journal, describe the evidence you find. Draw a squirrel, their tracks or other signs of squirrels you find. Write a narrative: A day in the winter life of a Red or Gray Squirrel.

