

# Going Squirrelly?

BY BILL EARL

*Handling squirrels that enter your customers' homes is a frustrating job. Here are some tips to help.*

I deal with desperate people. Even sweet little old ladies tell me, "Mr. Earl, I don't care what you have to do to the squirrels, just get them out of my attic."

I solve squirrel problems. Oftentimes they are the really tough problems that wildlife control companies have walked away from. I solve 35-year-old problems where the homeowners have one of two choices, either learn to live with the squirrels, or move. Homeowners will often move out in the summer when the squirrels are nesting in trees. Guess what? In the fall, new homeowners are faced with the same old problem.

The following article covers the method I use to get squirrels out of attics and crawl spaces.

**THE PROBLEM.** I've seen squirrels climb the brick wall of a four-story apartment house in a matter of seconds. They can climb stucco just as easily. Also consider how squirrels deal with obstacles. They can pull apart terra cotta and slate roofs. They can chew straight through quality shingles and sturdy wood to gain access. (They did on my own roof twice.)

With the biting power of 22,000 pounds per square inch, squirrels can chew through aluminum fascia capping and louvered aluminum gable vents. Even brick is not impenetrable. I have seen situations where squirrels climbed down a chimney and pushed in a brick to enter an attic crawl space. Battling squirrels is like fighting a miniature army. They chew holes in high hard-to-reach parts of the roof. They work alone and in groups. Squirrels work in shifts, day and night. At night they are chewing a hole from the inside of the attic to the outside. That is the aggravating sound the customer hears at 1:30 a.m. Ever wonder why you have not

actually seen squirrels chewing a hole in your fascia? Professor James Hare of the University of Manitoba reports that squirrels warn each other of impending danger in an ultrasonic voice, above our hearing range.

Squirrels are territorial. They staked off your customer's attic as *their* territory. In large attics, one end is the nesting area and the opposite end is used as a latrine. That unmistakable odor of urine is imbedded in your customer's attic, marking it the squirrel's territory. The life span of an Eastern grey squirrel ranges between three and eight years. In houses with infestations spanning decades, generations of squirrels may have been born there. Squirrels mate in early winter and produce offspring by late spring. The average litter consists of four squirrels. A second litter in mid-summer is not uncommon. Usually, there is a food stash of nuts stored in the walls, attracting many more squirrels than you might have

previously imagined. A long-term squirrel problem is embarrassing and dangerous. Roughly 50 percent of all the attics I enter have wires chewed by squirrels. Often, wires are chewed down to the bare copper.

**MY CONTROL METHODS.** Obviously it is necessary to get your hands dirty when working to control squirrels. Here's my hands-on approach.

First, I find the entrance/exit holes. Usually, there are two. This is the small doorway that squirrels have found, or made by chewing, and are using to enter and leave your customer's home. Then, I liberally coat the rim of the holes with J.T. Eaton's 4 the Birds Bird Repellent Gel. It is harmless, but incredibly sticky and something that squirrels hate. Then, I leave the holes alone and return in a few days.

When I return, I look closely at where I



smear the gel. If the gel looks untouched, if there is no fur sticking to it, then the squirrels are not aggressive. After the second inspection I wait an additional three weeks. If the gel still appears undisturbed, I simply close the holes. If, on the other hand, I return after a few days and the squirrels have been diving through the holes, leaving

## Controlling Tree Squirrels, part 1

Some options pest management professionals should consider when faced with challenging tree squirrel accounts:

**Pruning.** Tree branches should be pruned at least 6 feet from all building surfaces. The removal of tree limbs that overhang the roof will sometimes eliminate access by squirrels.

**Refraining from Feeding.** Feeding squirrels is a sure way to encourage nesting in nearby trees or the dwelling itself. Those with squirrels invading structures should be admonished to refrain from feeding them close to occupied buildings.

**Exclusion.** Exclusion (rodent proofing) is the best and most permanent solution to squirrels gaining access to dwellings. Sheet metal or wire hardware cloth is most often used to close openings. It is important when closing all possible entry routes not to trap animals inside. Therefore, a thorough trapping effort must precede any exclusion procedure in order to achieve lasting results. Squirrels may be prevented from climbing trees by attaching a wide metal band or collar around the trunk at least 6 feet from the ground. Aluminum roof flashing, fitted snugly, works well but must allow for growth to prevent damage to the trees.

**Live-Trapping.** If the population of tree squirrels must be reduced, trapping is most often the method of choice. If squirrels are entering the premises via overhead routes such as trees or power lines, trap placement on rooftops at gutter level or secured to tree limbs may be the most appropriate settings. For best results in dealing with trap-shy squirrels, traps should be prebaited for several days with the doors secured in the open position; when the bait is readily taken, the traps can be rebaited and set. Live-catch traps should always be checked at least once daily to remove squirrels or to release other animals accidentally captured.

**Lethal-Trapping.** Where legal, smaller tree squirrels can be killed with ordinary wood snap traps used for rats. All baits should be tied to the trigger with thread or light string; otherwise, some squirrels will become proficient at stealing baits without being caught. These traps can be nailed or fastened to fences, tree limbs and rooftops to increase trap effectiveness. Modified box-type pocket gopher traps are also effective kill traps for tree squirrels when baited with nuts. Body-grip kill traps or tunnel-type lethal traps can give excellent results, but care must be taken to avoid capturing nontarget species.

**Repellents.** Nontoxic sticky repellents (e.g., polybutene) may be helpful in discouraging tree squirrels from walking or climbing on some surfaces. At least one tacky repellent is currently registered for tree squirrels. — *Excerpted from the Mallis Handbook. To order, visit [www.pctonline.com/store](http://www.pctonline.com/store)*

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traces of fur in the gel, if there appears to be more chew marks than before and if holes appear bigger, then no doubt this is a severe problem. Their aggressiveness tells me that they are returning to their home. A squirrel family can occupy three different nests dur-

ing the course of a year. With severe squirrel problems, your customer's warm attic is their most important nesting site. When it starts getting cold outside, they want to be inside the attic. As many pest management professionals know, when squirrels really want to

come inside, they are coming inside. 

*The author is vice president of Evictor Products and co-inventor of the Squirrel Evictor. Visit his company's Web site at [www.squirrel-evictor.com](http://www.squirrel-evictor.com).*

## Controlling Tree Squirrels, part 2

**A**n nasty environment must be created in the attic so that squirrels won't want to be there. Easier said than done, right?

Another solution for the control of tree squirrels is the installation of The Squirrel Evictor, a high-intensity strobe light that comes in two sizes and pulses 90 times per minute. The power of the smaller unit, the MB10K, is 175,000 candlepower. The power of the larger unit, the MB100K, is 1 million candlepower.

The Squirrel Evictor Strobe Light is a new tool that can best be described as a repellent. It annoys the animal's sense of sight and is intolerable. After installation of the strobe light, flying squirrels and Eastern grey squirrels vacate the attic within one or two days.

No other light source should be on to interfere with the performance of this product while in use. If there are windows in the attic I tape cardboard over them to block off any outside light. It is highly recommended that a switch be placed near the entrance of the space where the unit can be turned on and off remotely. I

found that for small attics it is convenient to plug the MB10K unit into a nearby light fixture. For large attics, where multiple strobe lights are used, I use extension cords and plug them into a power strip placed near the attic opening. Using the on/off switch on the power strip, all the strobes can be turned on or off simultaneously. Finally, for best results, it is highly recommended that the unit be operated continuously. **DO NOT** seal the entrance/exit holes for at least one month. Exposure to the strobe trains the rodents to hate your customers's home and discourages gnawing and further property damage. I close the holes 30 days after strobe installation. I try to leave a small opening for the squirrels to see inside. Then later when they venture back to the house, a view of the strobe light is a reminder that this is one place they do not want to go.

I had squirrels in my own attic crawl space for 25 years. I was anxious to solve my own problem. Up until two years ago nothing worked. I installed three of the smaller MB10K units and my home has been squirrel free ever since. After the strobe installation, I was sure I had a winner when I saw the squirrels building a new nest in my backyard maple tree, away from my house. — *Bill Earl*



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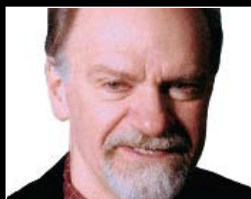
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