

**First Sighting – Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Location:** \_\_\_\_\_



John White

## Southern Flying Squirrel (*Glaucomys volans*)

The smallest tree squirrel in North America, this species measures 9-10" (including a 4" tail) and weighs just 2-4 ounces. They are common in suburban areas but are rarely seen because of their nocturnal and arboreal nature. They have large eyes and a brownish-gray body with white bellies. They are easy to tell from other squirrels because of the flaps of skin stretching between their front and back legs. This membrane (called a patagium) is attached from extendable cartilage at their wrists and allows them to glide up to 100 yards at a time. Flying squirrels also have flattened tails, but do not, contrary to popular belief, use them to steer. Rather, they bank, pulling up the patagium from one side or another and can make dramatic and accurate maneuvers. An individual can even make a complete turn and end back where it started. They glide (not fly) about 1 foot for every 2 feet of height they start at.

### What Flying Squirrels Need

**Food:** This is the most predatory of our squirrel species, eating many insects, occasional small animals and perhaps even bird eggs. The diet also includes berries, fruit, seeds and fungi. In winter the main food source is nuts, particularly hickory. A nearby water source is essential.

**Breeding:** Females use holes in trees and snags (standing dead trees) as breeding dens. Individual squirrels have up to 2 litters a piece, the first in late March or early April, the second in late June or July. Fall litters are uncommon. Gestation is about 40 days and 2-7 (3 average) young are born.

### How You Can Help

- Provide native berry shrubs and nut trees
- Reduce or avoid use of insecticides as they will poison the insects these squirrels eat.
- Plant host plants for caterpillars which are their favorite insect prey.
- Set up feeders with seed, suet, peanut butter or nuts in winter. Attach to a tree or elevate it near your window for great dinner-time entertainment.
- Provide water if no natural source is near. Place a stick in the water to avoid squirrel drownings.
- Leave large trees with holes standing, whether live or dead. Fully dead trees that are a hazard to property can have their tops removed, leaving their non-hazardous trunks standing for cavity nesters like flying squirrels, woodpeckers, blue birds and chickadees.
- Provide flying squirrel nesting and roosting boxes on your property (see "Resources").

**First Sighting – Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Shelter:** Flying squirrels use holes in both live trees and snags. Leaf nests (drays) are constructed much like Gray Squirrels if no cavities are available. Stands of deciduous trees that provide a mixture of cavities and leafy branches are essential for shelter from weather and predators.

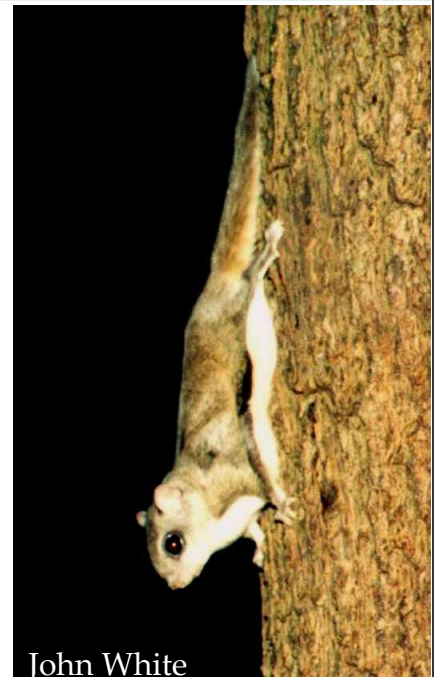
**Other:** If all their requirements are present (especially mature hickory trees) this species can live close to people and may even outnumber Gray Squirrels. In winter they are social and will pack together in tree cavities/roosting boxes for warmth. Their biggest concerns are lack of dens, natural foods and predators, especially outdoor cats and owls.



John White

- Provide roosting boxes
- Leave large trees with holes standing, whether live or dead.
- Secure openings to your attic and chimney to prevent any accidental enterings.
- Plant stands of oak, hickory, sycamore and maple for future cavity nesting sites.

- Keep cats indoors, reduce pesticide use, and provide nesting boxes and you may be entertained by this amazing, big-eyed night-glider.
- Attend one of the night programs on flying squirrels offered at local nature centers to see these creatures up close and to learn more about attracting them.



John White

**Resources:**

Native plants—available at Nature by Design, Merrifield Garden Centers and other nurseries

Flying Squirrel box plans – [www.wildaboutgardening.org/en/features/section1/squirrel\\_box/index.htm](http://www.wildaboutgardening.org/en/features/section1/squirrel_box/index.htm)

**Model Habitat and Observation Sites:**

**Long Branch Nature Center –**

<http://www.arlingtonva.us/departments/ParksRecreation/scripts/nature/ParksRecreationScriptsNatureLongbranch.aspx> and **Hidden Oaks Nature Center -** <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/hiddenoaks> - Squirrel Programs

**Prince William Forest Park -** [www.nps.gov/prwi/](http://www.nps.gov/prwi/)

**Visit [audubonva.org](http://audubonva.org) for more information and other Fact Sheets**