



Squirrels

➤ A LADY with a marked distaste for rodents was strolling in the park one day. A squirrel, emboldened by intimations of hunger brought on by portents of impending winter, ran up to her with a mute plea for a handout.

Steeling herself to look the little beggar in the eye, the lady exclaimed, "Go away. You don't fool me for one minute with your big bushy tail, you little rat." The squirrel didn't tarry to hear more. With the days getting shorter and a winter's store of nuts to get in, he hastened off to fill his quota in more sympathetic quarters.

This is a true story. Both the lady and the squirrel can attest to it. And although the lady is no zoologist, she very deftly, with the intuition for which her sex is famed, touched the very heart of the matter. For the kinship between squirrels and rats is very close indeed.

Squirrels and rats, together with mice, woodchucks, gophers, chipmunks, beavers and muskrats, to name only some members of the order, are members of the rodentia. The rodents, highly prolific in a family way, are also extremely prodigal in the variety of species and genera that comprise the clan.

But of them all, the squirrel is perhaps

unique for his purely decorative value. On the hoof that is. No self-respecting park would be without its quota of squirrels. In fact, few other animals make their home there. The only other animals seen in parks with any frequency are the familiar biped, with or without his dog, and of course pigeons, sparrows and starlings, among the commoner birds.

At this season of the year, the squirrel is at his busiest. He scurries hither and yon, looking for nuts and cones to lay by for the grim days ahead. In urban areas, as noted above, he sheds any timidity he may still retain, accosting total strangers. At his tamest, he is astonishingly audacious. Park bench philosophers have been known to reach absent-mindedly into their coat pockets only to find an optimistic squirrel ferreting there for stray goobers.

The red squirrel, sketched here, is a denizen of the northern part of the country. No one who has walked through the fall woods can have failed to notice him. He is a notorious chatterbox, filling whatever quarter of the woods his business takes him to with his grievance of the moment.

He scolds his wife, harangues his enemies, and heaps fluent abuse on any mere human who happens to stray within the very considerable range of his voice.

But despite the endless charm he finds in filibustering, he does a very methodical job of marketing for the winter larder. He

is a superior judge of nuts and seeds, and despite the impression he gives that half his attention is directed elsewhere, very rarely can a bad nut or spoiled seed be found hidden in his winter cache. He has mastered the knack of doing two things at once.

Science News Letter, December 3, 1949

During the past war, a total of 12,000,000 tons of *refuse* was collected in the United Kingdom and converted into \$140,000,000 worth of agricultural and industrial materials, including airplane parts made from waste paper.

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