



Southern Flying Squirrel Babies



Northern Flying Squirrel



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The Flying Squirrel

Northern Flying Squirrel *Glaucomys sabrinus*

Southern Flying Squirrel *Glaucomys volans*

Flying Squirrels are a tribe of about fifty species of the Squirrel family Sciurida. New York State is home to the Northern Flying Squirrel and the Southern Flying Squirrel. The Northern Flying Squirrels favor habitat north of the Mohawk River Valley; they like the higher elevation of the Adirondack and Catskill mountain regions. The Southern Flying Squirrel favors lower elevations and likes mature forests, especially ones with red and white oak, beech, and hickory trees. Their ranges overlap.

The Northern Flying Squirrel is the larger of the two species; 10 to 12 inches in length, they have a light brown, cinnamon-colored upper body, gray on their flanks, and a gray belly. The Southern Flying Squirrel is smaller, 8 to 10 inches in length; they have grayish brown fur on top, darker brown flanks, and a cream-colored belly. Both have long whiskers and a flat tail.

Flying Squirrels do not actually fly, they glide from one tree to another. They do this with the aid of a patagium, which is a furry skin flap that stretches from their wrists to their ankles on each side of the body. They launch themselves from a high point in a tree and spread their limbs, causing the patagium to become taut and create an aerodynamic surface. The Squirrel moves its limbs and uses its tail as a rudder to steer its path. They can glide over 150 feet between trees at a speed of five to twenty miles per hour without touching the ground, and they can make 180-degree turns to avoid flying predators such as owls. They have strong padded feet which allow them to land silently on all four feet.

Flying Squirrels are nocturnal, and because they leave their nests at dusk, they are not commonly visible to humans. They have large eyes that aid with navigating the forest canopy in the dark. They spend most of their time in the treetops, coming down occasionally to forage for food. Their diet consists of nuts, acorns, seeds, blossoms, moths, beetles, carrion, insects, spiders, snakes, fungi, small birds, and their eggs.

They nest in tree cavities, rock crevices, cliffs, woodpecker holes, and treetops. They make their nests out of leaves, shredded bark, and moss. A very sociable animal, they may engage in communal nesting to keep warm.

Mating occurs in late February to early March. There is a 40-day gestation period, and the mother gives birth to an average of three to four babies. A second litter may be born in August or September. The mother takes care of the babies by herself. When they are born they are pink, furless, blind, and deaf. Their ears open at 2 to 6 days old, their fur grows in about 7 days, and their eyes open in about 28 days. At six weeks they can forage on their own, at which time they have grown to the same size as an adult. They may stay with their mother until she has another litter. They reach sexual maturity around two years of age. Life span is 10 years, but most survive only about 5 years.

Predators are tree snakes, raccoons, owls, martens, fishers, and domestic house cats. Other threats to their survival are the destruction of their habitat through development, environmental factors, and climate change.

Conservation Status: Least Concern

Mythology: In cultures around the world Flying Squirrels have been associated with freedom and adventure and are seen as symbols of agility, adaptability, the courage to take risks, luck, and grace.