

Squirrels

SCAVENGER HUNT



NATURAL
HISTORY
MUSEUM
LOS ANGELES COUNTY

Let's Look for Squirrels!



SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SQUIRREL SURVEY

Most squirrels are diurnal rodents, which means they are active during the day. This makes them one of the few types of rodents that are easy to see. Several species of squirrel call Los Angeles County home, ranging from California ground squirrels on the coast to lodgepole chipmunks at the top of Mount Baldy. The Southern California Squirrel Survey aims to document where these different species of squirrels occur. Some of the primary objectives are to determine where different species co-occur, how the ranges of non-native species change, and what types of urban habitat squirrels are using.

Two of the most common species to see are the California ground squirrel and the eastern fox squirrel. California ground squirrels can be found in a large variety of habitats, such as coastal scrub, grasslands, oak woodland, and rocky outcrops. They have mottled gray fur with a bushy tail and a white ring round the eye. As their name implies, they live in burrows in the ground. Eastern fox squirrels have been introduced from eastern North America and are thriving in Los Angeles. They inhabit most urban environments that have trees, from backyards to parks. Eastern fox squirrels have brown or orangish brown fur and can often be seen running along the tops of fences or power lines. We are particularly interested in documenting their occurrence to determine if they are expanding their range in the Los Angeles area.

There are several other species of squirrels in Los Angeles County. The western gray squirrel is a tree squirrel that used to be found around urban areas, but has been displaced by the introduced fox squirrel. You can still see gray squirrels in less developed areas, particularly in the forests. Golden-mantled ground squirrels have black and white stripes on their sides but not their face and are usually orange or gold around their neck. Golden-mantled ground squirrels live in the forests at higher elevations and can sometimes be seen hanging out on top of rocks. White-tailed antelope squirrels have a white stripe down their side and live in dry habitats such as the foothill scrub, chaparral, and desert. Round-tailed ground squirrels also live the deserts, they are a pale sandy color with a white ring around their eye. There are two species of chipmunks in the area, Merriam's chipmunk and the lodgepole chipmunk. Chipmunks have stripes down their backs and sides, but can be distinguished from other striped squirrels by the stripes on their face. Merriam's chipmunk is in chaparral and forests found below 9,000 feet in elevation, and the lodgepole chipmunk is associated with conifer forests above 5,000 feet in elevation. The other squirrel in Los Angeles county is nocturnal; the Humboldt flying squirrel comes out at night and glides between trees. These squirrels have flaps of skin between their forelimbs and hind limbs that they use for gliding, they don't actually fly.

Can you spot these squirrels?



NORTHERN FLYING SQUIRREL
Glaucomys sabrinus



WESTERN GRAY SQUIRREL
Sciurus carolinensis



LODGEPOLE CHIPMUNK
Tamias speciosus



MERRIAM'S CHIPMUNK
Tamias merriami

IMAGE CREDITS:

Northern flying squirrel: Carl Wozniak; Western gray squirrel: egroom; Lodgepole chipmunk: dikdik