

# LaRC's **SOUTHERN** Nature Series **FLYING SQUIRREL**

**LATIN NAME:** *Glaucomys volans*  
**LIFESPAN:** 3-5 years in the wild;  
10-19 years in captivity!  
**SPECIES STATUS:** Least Concern

More commonly **FOUND** in beech-maple, oak-hickory, and poplar forests.

Strictly **NOCTURNAL**. Extremely **ACTIVE** during Autumn nights as they're busy gathering food for winter.

Breeds **TWICE** a year, during early spring (February to March) and summer (May to July).

Communicates through **ULTRASONIC** frequencies (exceeds audible limits of human ears), and a variety of high-pitched "**CHEEPS**" that sound similar to that of a bird.

❖ By modifying the angle of **SPECIALIZED HAIRS** in the patagium, they generate **LIFT** forces that allow them to glide great distances even while hauling around hefty cargo, like an enormous pine cone!

❖ The main role of Southern flying squirrels in the local ecosystem is seed dispersal of not only hardwood trees, but also fruiting bodies of subterranean fungi. The fungi mycelia are **HIGHLY BENEFICIAL** for tree growth due to association with tree roots.



Photo by: Kim Taylor

Flying squirrels do not hibernate during winter. In order to **CONSERVE HEAT**, they nest together in big groups of 10-20 squirrels.

**OMNIVORE** with a diverse diet including nuts, acorns, seeds, fruit, insects, young mice, carrion as well as fungus.

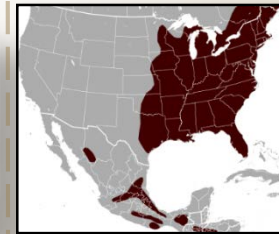
Characterized by a loose membrane located between the wrist of the front leg and the ankle of the hind leg, known as the **PATAGIUM**.

Common **NESTING** sites include abandoned woodpecker holes, bird and squirrel nests, nest boxes, and occasionally attics.

For any wildlife-related concern, please call the LaRC Environmental Office (Peter Van Dyke) at 864-7517

For more outreach items visit [environmental.larc.nasa.gov](http://environmental.larc.nasa.gov)

\* Data obtained from National Geographic.



Found throughout eastern United States, as far west as the Great Plains. Small, isolated populations found in Mexico and Central America.

Until recently, only 2 North American species were **RECOGNIZED** -the southern and northern (*G. sabrinus*) flying squirrels-.

	Underbelly Fur Color	Length Range (mm)	Weight Range (g)
<b>SOUTHERN</b> 	White/cream	200-285	38-90
<b>NORTHERN</b> 	Grey	250-300	70-140

In **2017**, a 3<sup>rd</sup> North American species was **RECOGNIZED!** Named **Humboldt's** flying squirrel (*G. oregonensis*), they're similar in appearance to *G. sabrinus* but generally **smaller and darker**.

## **MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE!**

In **2019**, researchers discovered that under ultraviolet light, all 3 species **FLUORESC**E in varying intensities of **PINK**. Hypotheses for fluorescence include night-time perception and communication, and mimicry as a mechanism to avoid predation (lichens and some owls are known to fluoresce).