

GRAY SQUIRRELS

AT WEEKES, SASKATCHEWAN

by DONALD HOOPER*

In December, 1972, a Gray Squirrel was shot in Ron Fullerton's yard about 10 miles northeast of Weekes, Saskatchewan. This specimen was donated to the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History in Regina. There is a previous record of another one taken in December, 1971, in the same yard. There is also an old report of one taken 2 miles from this locality about 15 years ago. This specimen was described as a large, grey squirrel, living in a granary in the winter time. It was finally shot and skinned and the hide was sent to the fur market in Prince Albert. It was returned because of no value (proving that it was not a Red Squirrel). After that the owners tried to sell it to Lund's Wildlife Exhibit in Prince Albert who said that they would surely have wanted this rare Saskatchewan species if it had not been skinned.

It has been thought by some that Gray Squirrels have been introduced in this province far from their natural range. This could be true in some cases, but I would like to present another possible theory.

The Gray Squirrel has often been referred to as "the migratory squirrel" because of unusual range-extending movements in the past. According to the Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Animal Kingdom: "When food is scarce, gray squirrels will devour everything edible, then migrate. An extraordinary migration of Gray Squirrels, from Wisconsin to Minnesota, took place in 1905 and necessitated the crossing of the Mississippi River".

The Hunter's Encyclopedia contains the following paragraph about the Gray Squirrel: "During the great squirrel year of 1935, for instance, when several mass migrations were observed (notably the one from New England into New York state), it was

also noted that three litters were produced that year instead of the usual two. It is possible that three litters may have occurred in the previous year as well."

The Gray Squirrel extended its range from Minnesota northward along the Red River valley into Manitoba. It ranged westward along the Assiniboine to Portage la Prairie by 1946. In 1958 Nero found that its range was in southeastern Manitoba west to Ninette.

The Gray Squirrel is now found regularly on the eastern slopes of Riding Mountain, occurring north to Dauphin and Gilbert Plains. It has become established near Binscarth, Manitoba, in the Silver Creek Valley, only 15 miles from the Saskatchewan border. Danny Clements reports that he sees it regularly, and that 2 years ago he saw young squirrels as well.

Other Museum specimens of the Gray Squirrel are listed as follows: Male No. 10,842. Donated by F. A. Schmidt, Arcola. Feb. 1970. Female No. 7080. Donated by G. Markel. Edenburg. March 11, 1959. Male No. 6752. Donated by E. Bookhammer, Strasbourg. Aug. 31, 1957.



Franklin's Ground Squirrel. R. E. Gehlert

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