

## RED SQUIRREL OBSERVED ACTIVE AT NIGHT

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The red squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) is a widely distributed species of the Sciuridae family in North America. It is a non-migratory, diurnal, terrestrial mammal which occurs in forested habitats from Alaska to Arizona, through some of the mid-western United States and down to North Carolina. With the exception of the extreme northern regions, red squirrels range throughout all of Canada, up to the Northwest Territories and east to Labrador.<sup>1</sup>

I live-trapped hares and small mammals in four vegetation communities on Long Point, Manitoba in fall (September-October) over a 20 year period (1971-1991).<sup>2</sup> Traps for hares were baited with apples, closed during the day, and set an hour or so before sunset to reduce the risk of catching red squirrels (red squirrels caught in the evening typically died overnight). More than 8000 hare trap-nights (100 traps X 4 nights X 20 years) were included during the study. Finding dead red squirrels in live traps was rare, however, the numbers caught increased as the trap checks progressed into the mornings. Over all those years I never heard of saw red squirrels much after sunset or before sunrise.

Red squirrels typically have a bimodal activity period (early morning and afternoon) in the summer and a single active period (during the warmest part of the day) in winter.<sup>3</sup>

Banfield states that red squirrels are "strangely active on moonlight nights in late summer." I observed no evening red squirrel activity or captures during moonlit nights at Long Point in September-October. Peterson<sup>4</sup> states that "the activity of the red squirrel begins with the first light of day and sometimes continues into the night, although it is usually diurnal".

On 11 March 1998, to my surprise, I heard a red squirrel calling at 10:20 pm CST near a house in urban Winnipeg, Manitoba. It was a cloudy, windy (15-25km) and cold night (-16°C), one day before a full moon. As I approached the sound, I noticed that there were several mature blue and white spruce trees next to the house. There was a light on (about 60 watts) over the front door of the house, another light on the front of the garage (about 60 watts) was on and a spotlight (at least 100 watts) was shining upward toward the trees. There was a house cat sitting on the ground below the trees, looking upward toward where the squirrel was calling. I observed the scene for several minutes before continuing my walk. As I retreated, the calling continued at least until I could no longer hear it.

It is possible that the light had stimulated the squirrel to be active at night and the cat was attracted to the squirrel; or perhaps, the cat had disturbed an otherwise inactive squirrel.





***Red Squirrel***

***C. Adam***

Whatever the cause, it is clear that red squirrels are plastic enough to potentially become active at night at least in lit environments. This factor, over time, may affect their range and/or their activity patterns. The observation was so far from what I had experienced that I thought it worth reporting. It will be interesting to see if this brief note elicits other observations of red squirrel nocturnal activity.

1. Wrigley, R.E. 1986. *Mammals of North America*. Hyperion Press Limited, Winnipeg. 360pp.

2. Koonz, W.H. 1988. Red-backed vole and snowshoe hare populations in relation to four boreal forest community types on Long Point peninsula, Manitoba. 1971-1987. Technical Rept. No. 88-04. Manitoba Natural Resources, Winnipeg. 30pp.

3. Banfield, A.W.F. 1974. *Mammals of Canada*. University of Toronto Press. 438pp.

4. Peterson, R.L. 1966. *The Mammals of eastern Canada*. Oxford University Press, Toronto. 465pp.