

## OBSERVATION OF RED SQUIRREL MATING BEHAVIOUR

An incident of mating behaviour by a pair of red squirrels (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*), though only observed for about 5 minutes by my wife, Ruth, and myself, seems worth recording. It is certainly something I have not previously seen. This took place in our Charleswood (Winnipeg, MB) yard on 24 February 2010, with the temperature at  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$ . We have no way of knowing when mating behaviour and copulation in this pair began, but I suspect that it was some time earlier and almost certainly some distance from where I first saw them.

I called Ruth to the window at about 17:41 h to see a pair of red squirrels copulating in the middle of our driveway on the hard and smooth packed snow surface. They were about 30 feet from the house. All was calm for a few seconds, then the female, who seemed desperate to reach some shelter, scrambled some 10 feet to the edge of the driveway, literally carrying the motionless male, who was clearly locked onto her in copulation. She first attempted to climb up the low bank of snow, the male still upon her back, then she resorted to burrowing into the snow and thereby up to the surface. She

emerged with the male still upon her back, but when she began to climb up upon a low-hanging cedar bough, the male fell backwards, though still attached to his mate—a ludicrous sight! She climbed upwards, he dangled momentarily, then he fell off and backwards into the snow, while she hurriedly climbed higher. A moment later, both squirrels were out of our view.

Wrigley (1986, p. 115) noted: "There are 2 mating seasons [for the red squirrel] throughout most of the range (February to March and June to July)... With the lengthening periods of daylight, the testes of the males enlarge and descend into the scrotum. The female comes into heat for only one day, during which she permits one or more adjacent males to enter her home range and mate. The mating chases are spectacular and noisy. Then she drives away all other squirrels and proceeds with her maternal duties on her own."<sup>1</sup>

1. Wrigley RE (1986) Mammals in North America. Hyperion Press Ltd., Winnipeg, MB.

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*The first great thing is to find yourself, and for that you need solitude and contemplation: at least sometimes. I tell you, deliverance will not come from the rushing, noisy centres of civilization. It will come from the lonely places.*

- Fridtjof Nansen