



Baby Tree Squirrels

Welcome to the world!

Wisconsin is home to three species of tree squirrels – the eastern gray squirrel, the fox squirrel, and the red squirrel. The eastern gray squirrel is the most common squirrel in the Madison area, and the following information is specific to them. Mother squirrels typically have two to four babies in a litter, and have one or two litters a year. In Wisconsin, the first litter of the year is typically born in March or April, and a second litter is born in July or August.

There's nothing better than the care of a mother!

Baby squirrels are hairless and pink when they are born. A good way to differentiate a baby squirrel from another species is by their dark toenails. Babies are born in a nest built by the mother in the crook of a tree, made mostly of dried leaves and twigs, and it is called a drey. Squirrels will also take advantage of tree cavities or people's homes for nesting sites if they are accessible. The babies will be weaned at about 10 weeks of age and ready to leave the nest when they are around 12 weeks old. Healthy baby squirrels are sometimes found on the ground. They may not be orphans, but simply need to be given time to be reunited with their mothers. Often, mother squirrels will return their fallen, healthy babies back to the nest by carrying them by the scruff of the neck.

Healthy babies should be reunited with mom!

Unhealthy babies with wounds, large numbers of fleas or ticks, fly eggs (which look like tiny, white grains of rice), or live maggots, or babies that are cold, limp or unresponsive should not be reunited. If your pet has injured one or more of the babies, or if a baby has been injured after falling from the nest, those babies need to be seen by a wildlife rehabilitator. Uninjured babies can be reunited with their mothers. If you're not sure if the babies are healthy, contact Dane County Humane Society's Wildlife Center at 608-287-3235, or call your local wildlife rehabilitator. Snapping a quick photo of them with your cell phone is a good way to help us assess the baby's condition.

Mother squirrels are prepared!

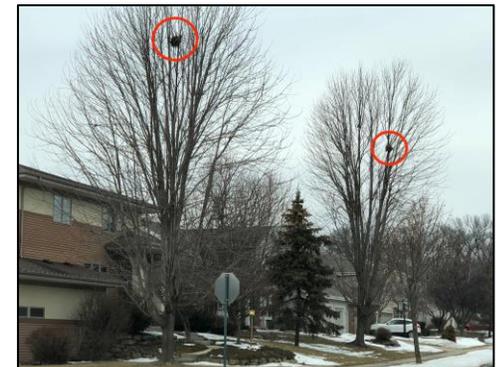
Mother squirrels will generally have a second nesting location available to her if she needs to relocate her babies. If her nest was destroyed or tree was cut down, there is still a good chance that the mother will return to retrieve her babies and take them to her secondary location.



These babies are just a few days old. Note the dark toenails. They are good candidates for reuniting.



This squirrel is not a candidate for reuniting. He is thin, has clumps of fly eggs on his neck, and his posture is abnormal for a baby.



These are squirrel nests, called dreys.

A few important things to know before reuniting.

- **Please do not offer any food or water to the babies** – doing so can have deadly consequences.
- The babies see you as a predator – do not play with or excessively handle them.
- A baby's best chance for survival is with the care of its mother. Reuniting is the right thing to do!

Steps to reuniting baby tree squirrels:

1. Be sure the babies feel warm to the touch. Mom will not retrieve a baby that is cold.
 - To warm the babies, use one of the following methods:
 - Fill a sock with uncooked rice. Microwave the sock in 30-second increments until it feels warm, but not scalding hot. It usually takes 2-3 minutes depending on the power of your microwave.
 - Fill a plastic soda or water bottle with hot water. Wrap the bottle in a soft cloth or put in a sock. Place it next to the babies.
 - Use HotHands or other brand of instant hand warmers under a layer of cloth near the babies.
2. Make a reuniting box. A small cardboard box works well. The container should deep enough so the baby squirrels cannot climb out.
 - Line the bottom of the container with a soft cloth. Fleece, a t-shirt or other materials without loops work well.
 - Place the heat source in the box with the babies. Reheat first if necessary. Be sure the heat source is not in direct contact with the babies by using cloth as a buffer between them and the heat source.
 - Surround the babies with natural nest materials from the area. Build up the nest materials around the babies with them nestled in the middle. If this is unavailable, use soft ravel-free material to make a circular donut around the babies.
 - If there is more than one baby, be sure they are snuggled together. This will help keep them warm.
3. Place the reuniting box in or under the tree in the area the baby was found.
 - Securing the box in the tree a bit off the ground will make the babies safer from ground predators during the reuniting attempt.
 - The box can be secured to the tree with twine, rope, a nail, bungee cord or any other materials available to you.



Infant Eastern gray squirrels approximately 1 - 2 weeks old.



This mom is carrying her baby off to an alternate nest site during a reuniting. She returned 5 times to retrieve all her babies. The person facilitating the reuniting was watching from inside her car.

- If you are unable to secure the box in the tree, set the box next to the base of the tree on the ground. Alternatively, the box secured to a short step ladder next to the tree.
 - If it is raining, the babies will need shelter to prevent them from getting wet. To do this, you can put the reuniting box inside an open plastic tote, tipped on its side.
4. Leave the area, and keep pets and kids away from the reuniting box. You may keep an eye on the box from inside your house, but do not repeatedly go out to check on the box.
 5. Return to the box to check on the babies at the end of the reuniting period based on the age and development of the babies, or at dusk, whichever comes first. The babies should never be left out after dark.
 - Reuniting period:
 - If the babies have pink skin with no fur: check in 2 hours
 - If the babies have some short fur, but their eyes are closed: check in 4 hours
 - If the babies have their eyes open: check in 6 hours
 6. If all of the babies are all still in the reuniting box after the appropriate reuniting time, please call Dane County Humane Society's Wildlife Center at 608-287-3235 or your local wildlife rehabilitator for further instructions. In the meantime, reheat the heat source and be sure the babies are still warm.
 - If one or more babies are gone, but some remain, mom is likely in the middle of moving the babies. If it is not dark yet, allow mom another 1-2 hours to finish moving the babies.

I've touched the babies. Won't mom abandon them?

No, a mother squirrel will not abandon her babies because you touched them. While it is advisable to handle them as little as possible, and to wear gloves while doing so, you can rest assured that mom will return to retrieve her little ones if she is able.

You can save the lives of baby squirrels by checking for nests before you cut down or trim trees.

If at all possible, avoid taking trees down between March and September during breeding season. A variety of wildlife species use dead trees as homes and nests including squirrels, songbirds, and some birds of prey. If the tree is a danger and must come down, you can help by checking for babies in nests or cavities to be sure they aren't injured during the cutting, and then an effort to reunite them with mom should be made after the work is done.



Infant eastern gray squirrels approximately 2 - 3 weeks old.

What if the mother squirrel nested in my house?

Although it is not ideal for the mother or her babies, a variation of exclusion techniques may be used during the breeding season to move a group of squirrels away from nesting in your home and still allow the mother to raise her babies. Call your local rehabilitator for further advice.

Steps include:

1. Identifying the access point
2. Removing the babies and placing them in a reuniting box
3. Preventing the mother from gaining re-entry to the nesting location
4. Following the reuniting steps listed above.

To see a reuniting from an attic in action, check out this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j1vyp9r7rY8>.