

PINES: Squirrels seek seeds

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provide a lot of different food types for squirrels at different times. Pinecones stay in trees much longer than a mature acorn and might provide food for squirrels for months.”

A single pine tree growing amongst thick hardwoods could attract squirrels like moths to a light. A creek lined with hardwoods slashing through a pine forest or an oak ribbon growing in a low ravine between hills creates transition zones that squirrels love.

“Squirrels are usually in forests with mixed pines and hardwoods,” advised Chester Thompson, an avid squirrel hunter. “I like to hunt the edges where a pine forest transitions to a hardwood bottom. Squirrels go back and forth from the pines to the hardwoods and vice versa.”

Beneath heavy-canopied pine forests, sportsmen often find a thick carpet of needles, husks and chips. This layer and the acidic nature of pine trees could hamper other vegetation from growing. Many pine forests look almost park-like so sportsmen can enjoy much easier walking than when sloging through a jungle-like swamp. Hunters can walk quietly on needles without crunching dry leaves so they can stalk close to trees with squirrels in them. Sometimes, a hunter can get directly under a tree harboring a squirrel or two.

Hunters commonly find more squirrels with their ears than eyes. Listen for husks dropping. Smaller chips sound like light rain falling. Hunters might also hear squirrels barking, claws scratching on rough bark or the sound of teeth tearing cones apart. Sportsmen can frequently spot falling husks or sunlight



In late summer and early fall, squirrels feed heavily upon green pinecones. They rip the cones apart to get at the succulent seeds. Here’s a squirrel left a partially eaten cone on the forest floor.

glinting off a chip fluttering to the ground. After spotting a falling chip or pinecone husk, a hunter can usually locate the squirrel by back-tracing the trajectory of the objects as they fall.

Bushytails also make nests in tall pine trees. In a spot with several leafy nests and pinecone debris on the ground, find a comfortable spot, sit still and quietly. Scan the trees for movement. After a while, get up, take a few steps and then stop, look and listen. Periodically, find a stump or fallen log to sit for another few minutes before moving again.

Squirrel season runs through March 8, 2020, with a limit of eight per person per day, but seasons could differ on public properties. Hunting pines in a mixed forest in early fall can put more weight in a game bag. In addition, sportsmen may find themselves almost alone among the pines as the other squirrel hunters head into the swamps and hardwood bottoms in places like the upper Mobile-Tensaw Delta.



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