

Predation of an Eastern Chipmunk, *Tamias striatus*, by a Gray Squirrel, *Sciurus carolinensis*

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I observed a Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*), attack and kill an Eastern Chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*) in Orange, Massachusetts. Published reports of Gray Squirrel predation upon other vertebrates consist only of bird eggs and nestlings.

Key Words: Gray Squirrel, *Sciurus carolinensis*, Eastern Chipmunk, *Tamias striatus*, predation, Massachusetts.

Animal foods are relatively uncommon in the diet of Gray Squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*) (Nichols 1958; Flyger and Gates 1990). Madsen (1964) indicated that squirrels frequently obtain calcium and other minerals from scavenged bones, shed deer antlers, and old turtle shells, while others report Gray Squirrels feeding on a variety of invertebrate prey (Hamilton 1943; Layne and Woolfenden 1958; DeGraaf and Rudis 1986). However, all published reports of Gray Squirrel predation on other vertebrates consisted of bird eggs and nestlings (Thoms 1922; Godin 1977). I report on a Gray Squirrel killing and apparently feeding on an Eastern Chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*).

My observation was made on the shore of Lake Mattawa, in the town of Orange, Worcester County, Massachusetts (ca. 42° 35'N, 72° 20'W). This man-made lake is surrounded by both seasonal and permanent homes within a mixed forest community dominated by White Pine (*Pinus strobus*), Eastern Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*), Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*), and Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*). The understory along the lakeshore is dominated by low Blueberries (*Vaccinium* spp.) and Black Huckleberry (*Gaylussacia baccata*) along with various ferns and herbs.

On 16 August 1993, attracted by a persistent screaming, I observed a Gray Squirrel attacking an Eastern Chipmunk. Clinging to the trunk of a White Pine approximately 1.5 m above the ground, the squirrel was grasping the screaming chipmunk by the back of the neck. The squirrel immediately carried the chipmunk up the tree to a leaf-nest approximately 10 m high where visual contact was lost. The chipmunk continued vocalizing for 5-10 seconds until an object fell from the nest. The squirrel immediately descended the tree and retrieved what appeared to be the chipmunk's head, and returned to the nest.

Since I did not witness the initial encounter I do not know if the squirrel actively pursued the chipmunk or preyed on it opportunistically. Other potential food sources were abundant at the time of the observation including blueberries, huckleberries, mushrooms, and a compost pile well-stocked with table scraps, indicating that food shortage was not a likely explanation for this predation. Although no direct evidence exists, it seems likely that the squirrel consumed the chipmunk based on the effort it expended to kill the animal, retrieve the head, and carry it to a nest.

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