

FIRST OCCURRENCE OF EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL ON THE SUNSHINE COAST, BRITISH COLUMBIA

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The Eastern Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*; Figure 1) has been introduced into British Columbia from eastern North America in two separate areas. One introduction, at Stanley Park in Vancouver, occurred about 1914 (Robinson and Cowan 1954) and the other, on southeastern Vancouver Island, in the late 1960s (Guiguet 1975).

The species is now well established in both areas and continues to expand its range (Nagorsen 2005). On the southwest mainland coast it has spread eastward throughout the Fraser River valley to at least Mount Lehman, north to West and North Vancouver, and south to Boundary Bay (Nagorsen 2005, G. Powers pers. comm.). There are also recent records from Bowen Island and the vicinity of Squamish. To date, the species has not been recorded on the mainland coast north across Howe Sound from West Vancouver.

On 27 December 2009, while searching for the elusive Western Scrub-Jay (*Aphelocoma californica*) along Gower Point Road, in lower Gibsons, BC., I observed a Gray Squirrel feeding on the ground under fruit trees in a large garden. It was a black morph, which according to Robinson and Cowan (1954) is the most common colour phase (84%) in Stanley Park. The habitat was an old established residential area of waterfront properties having well developed second-growth native coniferous and deciduous trees, as well as a good mix of introduced species, including several large hollies (*Ilex* sp.) and at least one oak (*Quercus* sp.).

The prior status of the species on the Sunshine Coast is uncertain. A local resident, who operates a bird-feeding station, advised that the single Eastern Gray Squirrel had been observed in this isolated area for two or three years. Local naturalist Tony Greenfield (pers. comm.) had also heard rumours

that a single squirrel was present somewhere on the southern Sunshine Coast but he did not have specific details.

This first confirmed sighting would be more significant if other Eastern Gray Squirrels are introduced and they start breeding. The Sunshine Coast contributes a significant part of the range for Douglas' Squirrel (*Tamiasciurus douglasii*) in British Columbia. Robinson (1951) found that these species had different habitat preferences in Stanley



Figure 1. Since being introduced to British Columbia at Stanley Park in Vancouver and on southern Vancouver Island in the early and mid-1990s respectively, the Eastern Grey Squirrel has filled a vacant niche and continues to expand its range each year. Victoria, BC. 20 May 2001 (R. Wayne Campbell).

Park, which reduced competition. However, it is possible that the two species would not co-exist on the Sunshine Coast.

Literature Cited

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