



Nature NB Program Kits:



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Introduction

- The activities in this kit will help you introduce the concept of animal behaviour and develop observation skills using squirrels.
- The kit is written primarily for New Brunswick educators. The information and activities in this kit are tailored to the level of grades 1-4, with specific curriculum links listed.
- The activities in this kit are organized to be held in succession, modeled after Joseph Cornell's Flow Learning Model¹.
 - A game to rid some energy
 - An activity using memory to understand the concept/importance of caching
 - A direct experience with nature to awaken love/ importance
 - A quiet, focused reflection activity.

With that said, each activity works as a stand alone, so feel free to pick and choose or modify the activities that fit best with your classroom.

Program Curriculum Links

Sourced from the Government of New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Curriculum Development, Anglophone Sector.

Grade 1

- **1.2.1** describe how plants and animals meet their needs in a given environment
- **1.2.3** observe and describe how living things respond to changes in solar energy that occur on a daily and seasonal cycle

Grade 3

Science

- **201-5** make and record relevant observations and measurements, using written language, pictures, and charts

Grade 4

Science

- **205-5** make observations and collect information relevant to a given question or problem
- **302-2** describe how various animals are able to meet their basic needs in their habitat

¹ [Flow Learning Model](#): Step 1: Awaken Enthusiasm Step 2: Focus Attention Step 3: Direct Experience Step 4: Share Inspiration



- **300-1** compare the external features and behavioural patterns of animals that help them thrive in different kinds of places

Grade K - 3

Language Arts:

- begin to develop, with assistance, some ways to make their own notes (e.g., webs, story maps, point-form notes)
- create written and media texts using a variety of forms

Grade 4 - 6

Language Arts:

- experiment with different ways of making their own notes (e.g., webbing, jot notes, matrix)
- expand appropriate note-making strategies from a growing repertoire (e.g., outlines, charts, diagrams)

Background Information

Today we will be talking about the Eastern Grey Squirrel and why they are important to our ecosystem. Who has ever seen a squirrel in their backyard?

Do you know why they might be important? Because they help to plant new trees and plants every year! Unlike some other mammal species, squirrels do not hibernate when it gets cold during the winter months in New Brunswick. This means they need to have a collection of food hidden in a safe place, for when they get hungry. This is just like how humans go to the store every week and bring a collection of food home to last for several days. When squirrels hide food for the winter, we call this **caching** and the area the food is stored is called a **cache**.

Just like humans, squirrels can be forgetful and they might not remember where they have stored all of the nuts and seeds that they hid for the winter. Grey squirrels can hide up to 3,000 seeds and nuts every year – so it's not surprising that they don't remember where they've hidden every single item. Because most of the nuts and seeds are planted in the ground for safe keeping, they can grow into a tree or plant if the squirrel forgets to retrieve them! This means squirrels are important to our ecosystem because they help us to expand forests and grow new life.



Preparing To Explore A Natural Area:

When exploring a natural area, it is always recommended to do a very quick check of the area in advance. Check for hazards like poisonous plants, thorns, dead trees, litter/broken bottles.

The existence of a hazard does not mean you need to cancel the outing (nature will always have certain hazards, after all!). However, you may need to make some modifications to what areas your group will explore or how you will explore them. For example, if you spot a stinging nettle plant and a pothole where children could twist an ankle, you could place a special marker like red flagging tape near those hazards. Before starting exploration, you could explain your boundaries and that the group must avoid areas near the red markers.

Activity 1: Squirrel Says

Materials: none

Location: Indoor /Outdoor

Time Required: 10 minutes

Activity Description: Much like “simon says”, squirrely says is an imitation game that gets students thinking about how squirrels behave in their daily activities.

Instructions: In a well-spaced area, have students stand in a group with room for movement. One student will be selected to be “Squirrel” and will give directions to the class that are based on squirrel movements and behaviours; ex: jump as far as you can, use your tail to protect you from rain, sneak quietly around. The student must say “Squirrel Says” for the instruction to be legitimate- if students follow a command without Squirrel saying “Squirrel says”, they will be eliminated from the game. Play in several rounds and alternate the position of Squirrel.

Activity 2: Cache and Seek

Materials: Small rock, leaf or stick; markers or paint; blank paper (optional).

Location: Outdoor

Time Required: 40 minutes on day 1, 15 minutes on day 2

Activity Description: Students will find something in nature that they will use for their cache such as a rock, leaf or stick- older students may choose to decorate and hide several items. Have students decorate their item(s) to their liking and with names so they are able to later identify them when retrieved. Next, give students time to dig and hide their item(s) somewhere in an outdoor area. If students choose, they may draw a map of the outdoor area with an X marking where they have buried their item(s) to remember for the following day.



On the second day (24 hours later), send students back out to retrieve their item(s) and test their memories, just like squirrels do every year! Discuss why the squirrel's behaviour (caching) is changing (changing seasons). Discuss what might happen if a squirrel is forgetful (cached seeds grow / forest regeneration).

Activity 3: Squirrel Observation

Materials: Observation sheet ([download here](#)), pencil

Location: Outdoor

Time Required: 20-30 minutes

Preparing to Observe

When engaging in an observation, it is important to stress the relevance of watching squirrels in their natural habitat without major disturbances such as chasing, yelling, or throwing objects. Students should watch respectfully without intentionally frightening or attempting to harm/catch a squirrel.

Activity Description: Students will go outdoors in an area where there are one or more squirrels and record their observations ([see observation sheet](#)). Behaviours such as movement, reactions to weather/traffic/humans approaching, nesting, eating, etc., will be tracked. Students can be asked to make predictions about the squirrel's behaviours. After observation, have students share their observations; compile common behaviours and discuss why these behaviours may be important for squirrel life; discuss reasons for differences in observations. Were the students observing squirrels in slightly different habitats? Were some students closer to the squirrels than others and affecting their behaviour? Or could it have just been differences in squirrel personalities?

Activity 4: Reflection Journal / Letter Writing

Materials: Journal or paper, pencil

Location: Indoor /Outdoor

Time Required: 15-20 minutes

Activity Description: Students write a letter from the perspective of the squirrel they observed or one from their imagination detailing a day in the life of a backyard squirrel. Younger students can use a combination of words and pictures to write their story. Students may share in small groups if desired.



Contact Us!

If you've used our program kits we would love to hear from you! Please email programs@naturenb.ca with feedback on your experience.

This program kit was developed with generous funding by:



Natural Sciences and Engineering
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en sciences
naturelles et en génie du Canada

