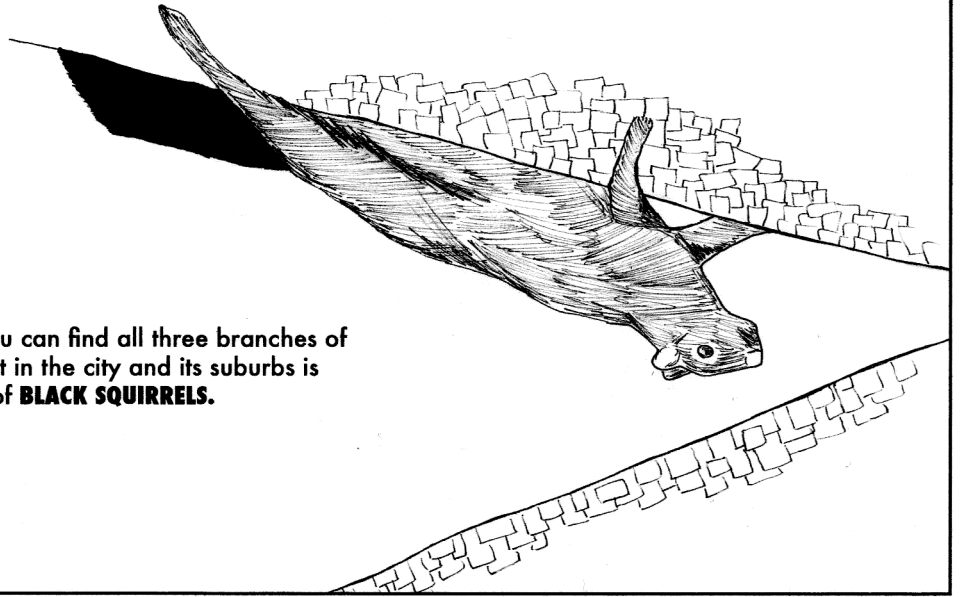


THE BLACK SQUIRRELS

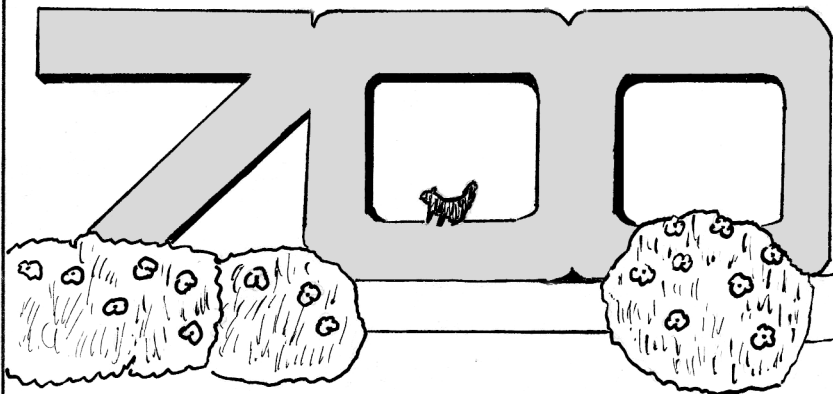
of Washington, D.C.



It's no secret that in Washington, D.C., you can find all three branches of government. But it's a little less known that in the city and its suburbs is one of North America's few populations of **BLACK SQUIRRELS**.

These jet black rodents are actually part of the Eastern Gray Squirrel species, or *sciurus carolinensis*. Although there are several species of squirrels in the United States, the DC area is only populated by Eastern Great Squirrels, which can also include reddish squirrels, albino white squirrels, and silver squirrels.

The black, or "melanistic" squirrels here can be traced back to 18 black squirrels donated to the National Zoo in 1902 and 1906.



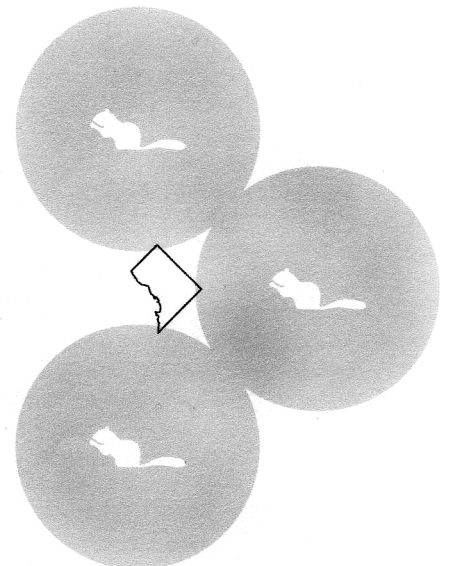
After a century, the black coat thrives amongst D.C.'s Eastern Grey Squirrels.

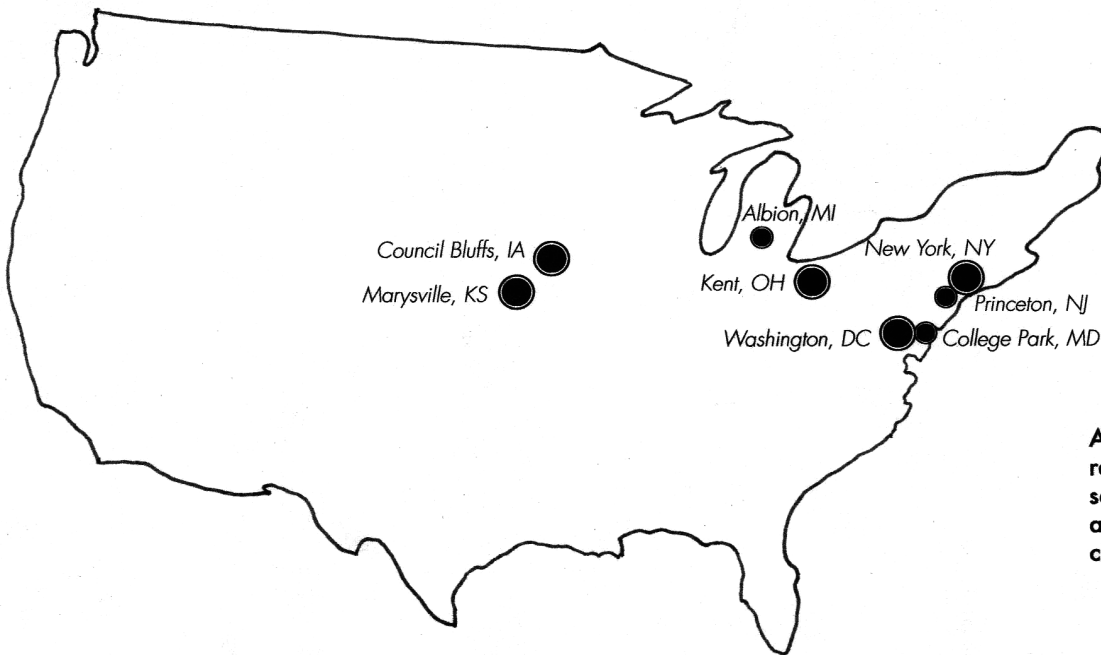


According to the Washington Post, the black squirrels make up nearly **A QUARTER** of some gray squirrel populations in the area.

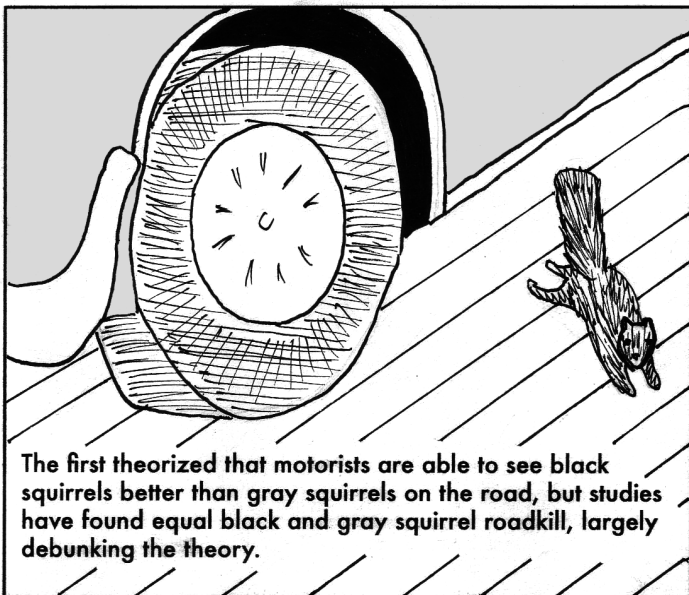
Black squirrels have also been sighted about 30 miles **NORTH**, **EAST**, and **SOUTH** of the city.

Various other college towns and cities in America claim black squirrel populations, and the black coat is much more common in Canadian cities like Toronto and London, Ontario.



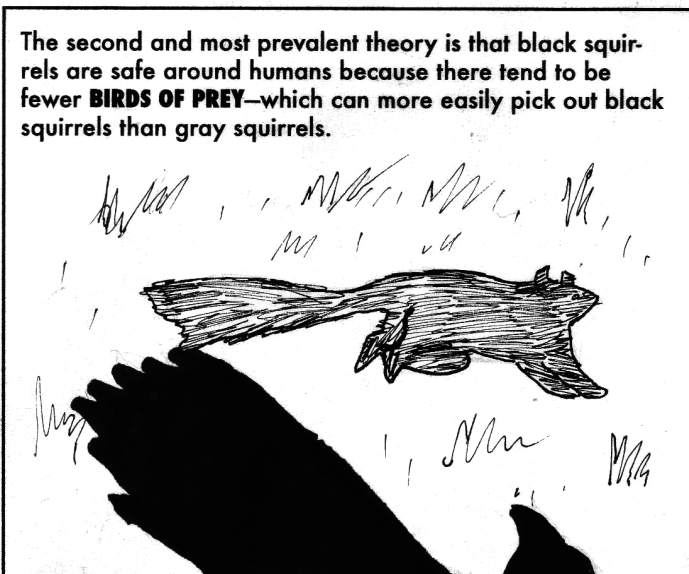


American towns with black squirrels can sometimes even trace their squirrels back to a "gift" from another place or squirrels that escaped from a **TRAVELING CIRCUS**.



The first theorized that motorists are able to see black squirrels better than gray squirrels on the road, but studies have found equal black and gray squirrel roadkill, largely debunking the theory.

Black squirrels are rarely seen outside of urban or suburban populations, effectively limiting the population growth. There are two main theories for black squirrel success around humans.



The second and most prevalent theory is that black squirrels are safe around humans because there tend to be fewer **BIRDS OF PREY**—which can more easily pick out black squirrels than gray squirrels.

Richard W. Thorington Jr., Curator of the Mammals Staff at the Smithsonian's Natural History Museum in Washington and local squirrel expert, advocates the birds of prey theory.



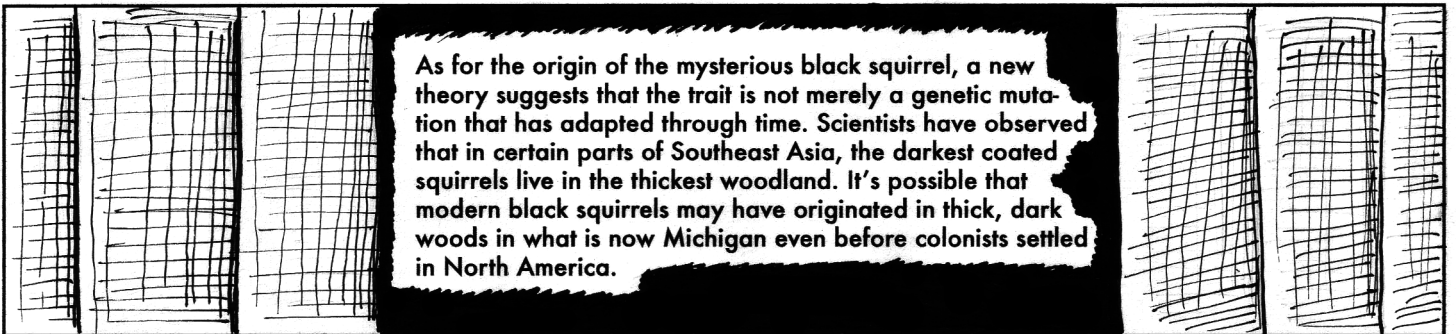
FOR SOME REASON, [THE BLACK SQUIRRELS] ARE BEING POSITIVELY SELECTED IN SOME REGIONS, AND BIRDS OF PREY ARE BEING NEGATIVELY SELECTED IN OTHER AREAS.

WE DO HAVE BIRDS OF PREY ON THE [NATIONAL] MALL, BUT THEY ARE NOT AS COMMON.

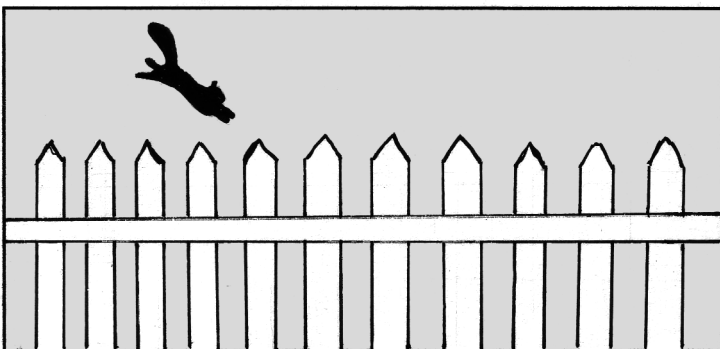
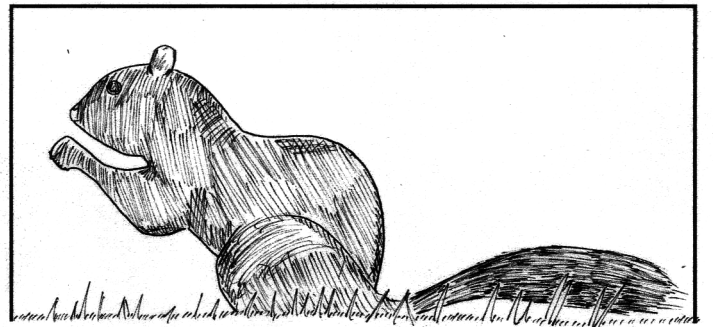
There are also the questions of why the black coat trait seems to be favored in northern latitudes, and where the trait came from in the first place. One theory is that the black squirrels are better able to **ABSORB HEAT** from the sun in colder, northern climates, giving them an advantage over gray squirrels.



According to Thorington, about two or three studies have been conducted, and the results are ambiguously mixed.



Little else is known about them, but black squirrels will most likely continue to drift from urban island to urban island, ducking raptors, stocking up on acorns for the winter, and bothering gardeners.



Written, drawn and designed by Josh Kramer.
josh.p.kramer@gmail.com
joshkramer.wordpress.com