

# GRAB BAG

BOOK SHELF // GLIMPSE // WILDLIFE // POP CULTURE // WORDS // Q&A // FOOD // FUN

## Wild SIDE

*Tamiasciurus douglasii*

### Douglas squirrel

By LYNETTE  
RAE MCADAMS

Although there are 265 species of squirrels in the world, the only one to inhabit the coastline of the Pacific Northwest is the Douglas squirrel. Named for the Scottish botanist and explorer David Douglas (who also has a namesake in the Douglas fir), this cheery little rodent inhabits every coniferous forest west of the Cascade mountains. Reddish-brown on top, with tan or orange-white underbellies and a white ring around the eye, it can grow to six or seven inches long, with another five to seven inches added for its bushy, animated tail.

Subsisting mainly on the seeds within the cones of spruce, fir and hemlock trees, Douglas squirrels

prefer old-growth or mature second-growth forests, and their presence is a sign of a healthy woodland

**BECAUSE  
THEY EAT  
ONLY ABOUT  
10 PERCENT  
OF WHAT  
THEY GATHER  
AND HOARD,  
SQUIRRELS  
ARE  
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FOR HELPING  
SEED OUR  
FORESTS,  
THEIR BURIED  
FOOD TAKING  
ROOT TO  
BECOME  
ANOTHER  
TREE.**

ecosystem. Incredibly territorial, a single squirrel will defend up to six acres of land, chattering incessantly at trespassers of every species using a distinctive, almost bird-like call that can sound a lot like a scolding. In the unlikely event that you don't hear them, look for piles of stripped cones and cone scales on the forest floor — sure signs of a squirrel's dinner table, and a place to which they always return.

Thinking mainly about food, *T. douglassi* spends much of its time in the trees, plucking its favorite cones and tossing them to the ground, where they'll be gathered later to horde in a specialized underground squirrel larder called a midden. Wanting to keep the location of the midden a secret from would-be thieves, the squirrel often only pretends to bury a cone, hoping to deceive any onlookers before scurrying away to the real cache. Because they eat only about 10 percent of what they gather and hoard, squirrels are responsible for helping seed our forests, their buried food taking root to become another tree.

Squirrels communicate through voice changes and scent markings, as well as with their tails; used as a signaling device, the tail is twitched in fright to alert other squirrels of danger. When they feel especially threatened, squirrels run in a zig-zag pattern, helping them evade most predators, but usually making matters worse when it comes to cars.

Depicted in the artworks of many Native American cultures, the squirrel symbolizes energy, preparation and thriftiness.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Douglas squirrels prefer old-growth or mature second-growth forests, and their presence is a sign of a healthy woodland ecosystem on the Pacific Northwest coast.

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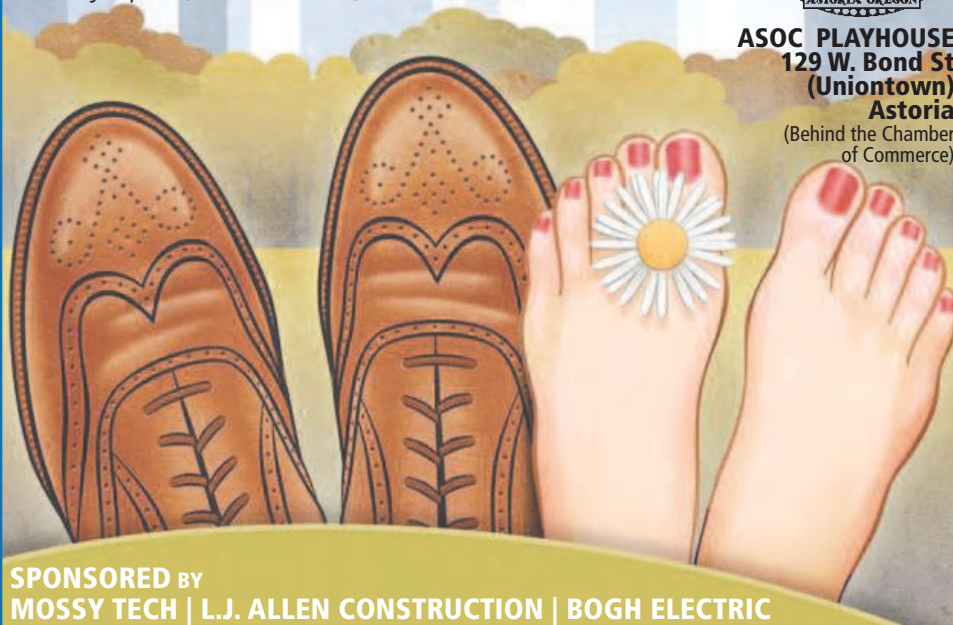
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