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Squirrel research: Project seeks help in documenting squirrel activity in Chicago area

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Got room for a little squirrel in your weekend plans?

A coalition of environmental researchers is asking Chicago-area residents to record sightings of squirrels on a Web site, www.projectsquirrel.org, to gain a better understanding of our furry urban neighbors.

Led by the Chicago Academy of Sciences, the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum and the University of Illinois at Chicago, the multiyear project is gathering squirrel data to fill in scientific gaps about how food and other resources are distributed in the wild, about squirrel population and about how humans affect the natural habitat, said Steve Sullivan, an urban ecologist at the Notebaert museum.



The project, paid for in part through private donations, has had about 500 submissions since its launch in March. But Sullivan is hoping for about 5,000 before its conclusion.

Participants will be asked to answer 12 questions about their squirrel sighting, including details about times, location and any unusual circumstances. Because accuracy is always a concern with blind submissions, Sullivan said there won't be any grand assumptions made about single observations from a particular neighborhood.

"Squirrels are squirrely and there's a lot we don't know about how they interact in the world," Sullivan said. "This project is about trying to look at the world through their eyes."

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