

# White squirrels a puzzle, say experts

**LISA TALLYN**  
Staff Writer

When Jenny Blunt first spotted what looked like a white squirrel in her backyard shortly after Christmas she thought she was seeing things.

"I didn't even know they existed," said Blunt, who decided to do some research on the Internet and discovered although they are quite rare, there was such an animal.

Since then, the pale squirrel has become a regular at the bird feeder in their Irwin Cr. yard that backs onto a ravine.

"It's lovely," said Blunt, who enjoys watching all the wildlife that wanders onto her property and has taken several pictures of the squirrel.

Local mammal expert Fiona Reid of Speyside, a biologist, artist and author of the *Peterson Field Guide to Mammals of North America*, says white squirrels are a "random mutation" of the eastern grey squirrel, which is the squirrel commonly seen

scampering through parks and yards in this area. Most often in this area of Ontario those eastern grey squirrels are actually black, but they can also be grey, brownish, and on occasion, white.

"Squirrels are so variable in colour and most animals are not. Nobody really knows why they are so variable in colour," said Reid.

She said while white squirrels are not common in this area, they are as abundant in a few places, like Greenwood, South Carolina, Trenton, New Jersey and Olney, Illinois, as black squirrels are here.

And closer to home, Exeter, Ontario—a small town near London—is known for its white squirrels. That colony of white squirrels has a website devoted to them at [www.whitesquirrels.ca](http://www.whitesquirrels.ca).

John Millar, a biology professor at the University of Western Ontario said white squirrels first appeared in Exeter many years ago.

"Now, virtually all of them are

white," said Millar. "It seems to be something associated with urban areas."

Millar didn't really have an answer as to why there are certain areas such as Exeter where white squirrels predominate.

"We really don't know much about those white squirrels," said Millar.

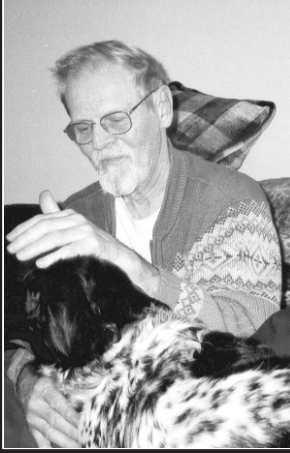
But he said overall there does seem to be a climactic link to the colours of eastern grey squirrels, as the further north one goes in North America the darker the squirrels get.

Blunt doesn't care so much about why the squirrel that visits her yard is white, she just wants it to stick around.

But she's not sure it will for long as a black squirrel in her neighbourhood is not as fond of its white counterpart as Blunt is, and has been seen chasing it from her yard.

(Lisa Tallyn can be reached at [ltallyn@independentfreepress.com](mailto:ltallyn@independentfreepress.com))

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