

No longer squirrely, thanks to intervention

Squirrels
You love 'em or you hate 'em.
For the first 10 of the past 43 years, I enjoyed them, even encouraged them, spreading large quantities of peanuts over our backyard.
And the rodents responded, only a few at first, then dozens. While neighbours questioned my generosity, I paid them no heed.



Roaming Around

with Jim Thomas

"You'll be sorry," they said.
But I wasn't, at least not then. With binoculars in hand, I'd watch their tree-top gymnastics with great interest. Even had young ones eating out of my hand. Lots of fun.

Recently, however, this interest has waned. I've taken more to attracting birds than squirrels. The two are a bad mix. Squirrels, particularly the black variety, tend to dominate. Even bolder blue jays and grackles can't compete.

It wasn't that I resented these rodents' enormous appetites so much, it was the waste. What wasn't scattered above ground was buried underground. Indeed, had the weather been right, I could have started a peanut farm.

But this was only part of the problem. Squirrels would tear stations down as fast as I'd put them up. Expensive ones, too.

As a permanent deterrent, I bought a \$100 import, described as squirrel proof. And it was, for two days. But where there's a will, there's a way. They found a solution by placing only one paw on the counter-balanced perch rather than four. Don't ask me how, they just did.

Next, I bought squirrel-proof seed. But it disappeared faster than regular seed.

PROTESTING IN PYJAMAS, SLIPPERS

As a last resort, I elected to stand guard, spending every waking hour looking out the kitchen window. When the squirrels approached, I would gallop outside, arms waving frantically in violent protest. Often clad only in pyjamas and slippers, I presented a very scary sight.

"You're going to have a heart attack," my wife Jean warned. "They'll be the death of me." I agreed.

To say our place had become over-run would be an understatement. We'd been invaded. Word had undoubtedly spread to every squirrel colony in Stouffville. They descended on us from all directions.

"You sure do treat your birds well," said the woman at the seed centre. "I wish," I replied. "Haven't seen one all winter."

Nor had I. None would dare come near.

On the verge of removing the feeders altogether, I ventured one afternoon into the back yard of neighbour Ray Wideman, to see if, by chance, he had come up with something new. He had, at least new to me. He constructed two galvanized funnels, attaching one to each vertical support post.

Without hesitation, I was on the phone.

"Could you do the same for me?" I asked.

"I'll drop by and have a look," he agreed. That same afternoon, he was there, sizing up the situation.

"I see no problem," he replied. On what was the coldest day of the winter, Ray installed two squirrel deterrents, one on the 15-foot pole and the other on the five-footer.

They're working wonders.

WISHING THEY HADN'T ABUSED IT

Yes, they've tried. Being the wily rodents they are, they've attempted everything imaginable to reach our feed stations, even to doing acrobatics on a nearby clothesline. Without success. Now, they merely sit in the snow and look up, imagining the good life they once knew and perhaps wishing they hadn't abused it.

I wouldn't be honest, however, if I didn't admit my contempt for these critters has waned somewhat, particularly during our recent cold snap. They appear dejected and rejected, woeful and unwanted. This, plus the fact the advice of neighbour Ray keeps ringing in my ears: "Squirrels must eat also." So, every morning, a spread handfuls of peanuts on the ground just so they'll know they still hold a soft spot — however small — in my heart.

On the plus side, our yard is now a feathered sanctuary second to none on the street. Equally important, I no longer need mortgage the farm to buy seed. I've won the approval of my banker as well as my birds.

Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 50 years.

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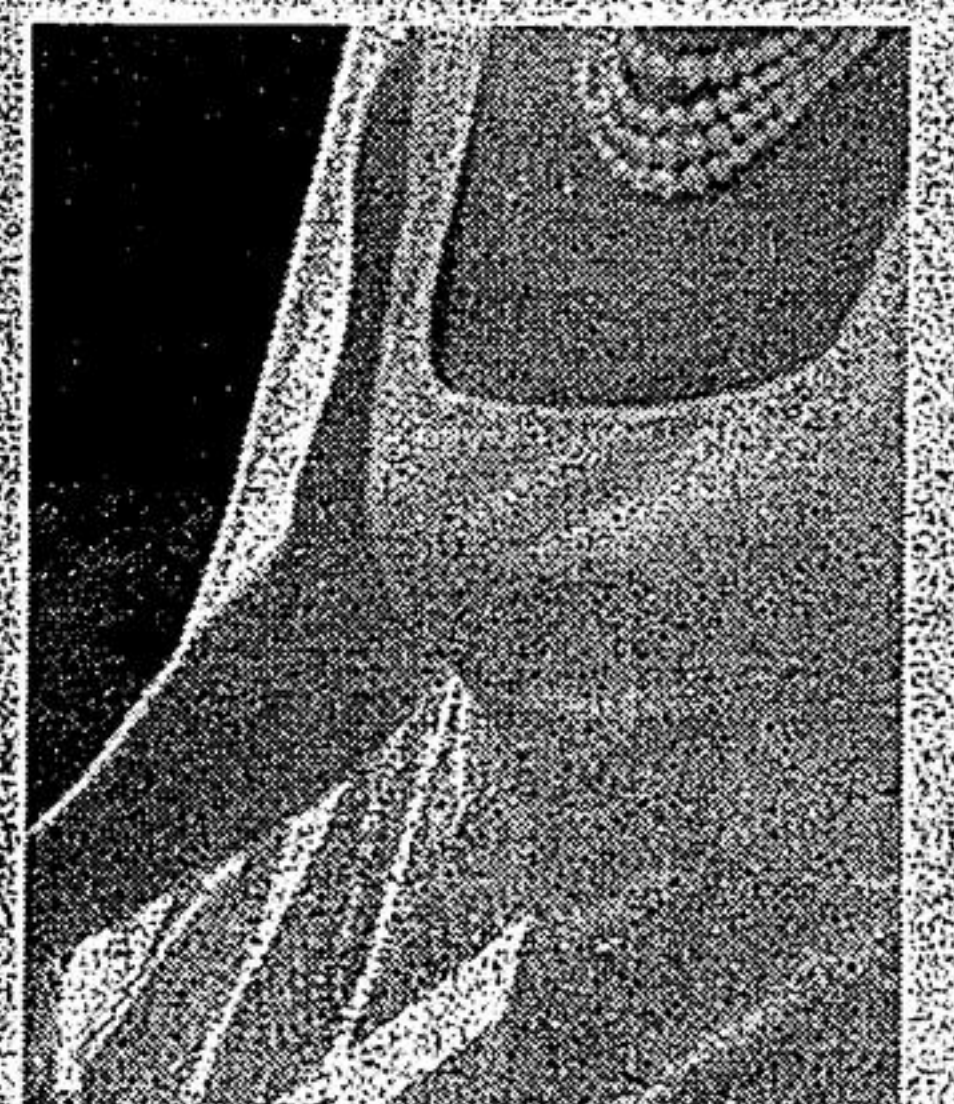
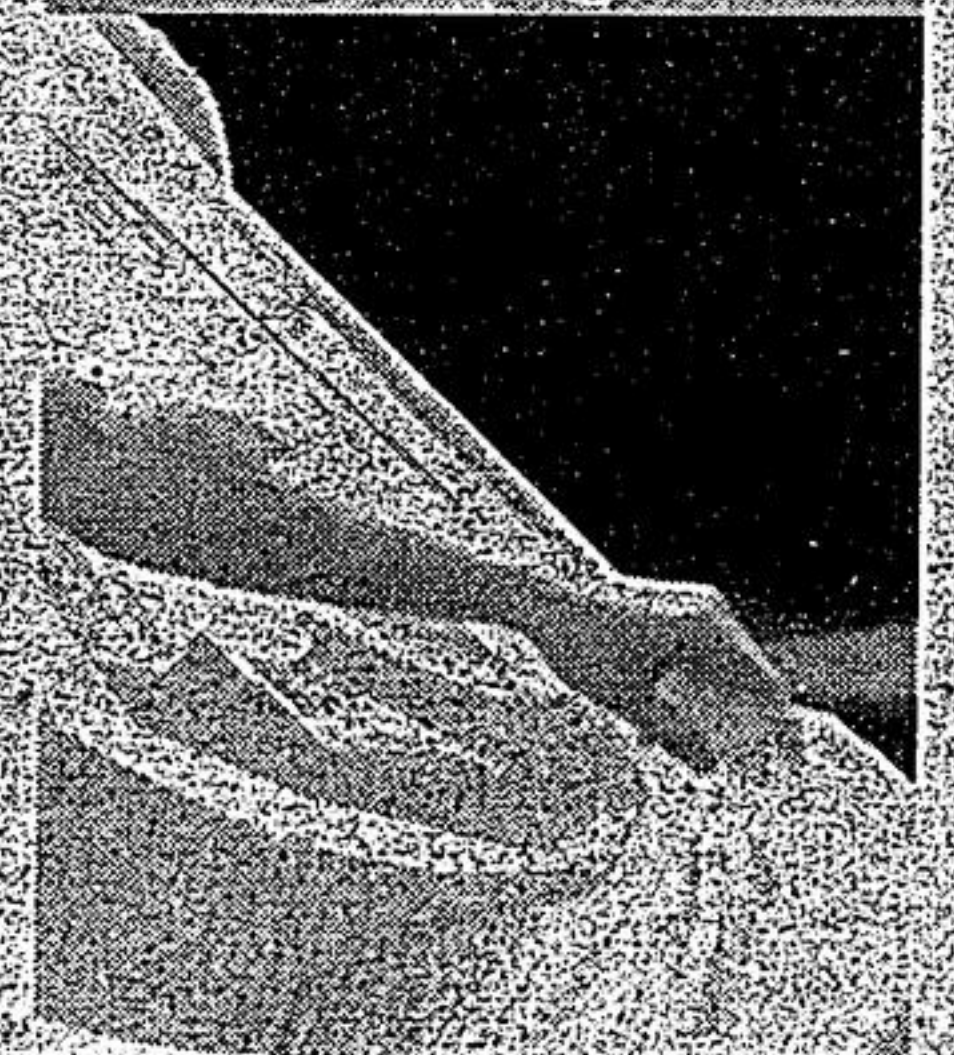
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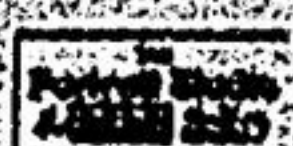
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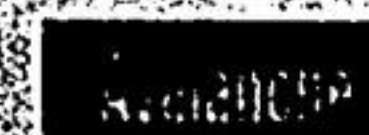
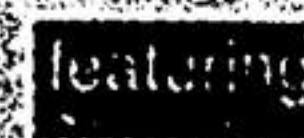


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