Sherman’s fox squirrel

*Sciurus niger shermani*

(Photo by FWC)

**Taxonomic Classification**

**Kingdom:** Animalia  
**Phylum:** Chordata  
**Class:** Mammalia  
**Order:** Rodentia  
**Family:** Sciuridae  
**Genus/Species:** *Sciurus niger*  
**Subspecies:** *Sciurus niger shermani*  
**Common Name:** Sherman’s fox squirrel

**Listing Status**

**Federal Status:** Not listed  
**FL Status:** State Species of Special Concern  
**FNAI Ranks:** G5T3/S3 (Globally: Demonstrably Secure, Sub sp. Rare/State: Rare)  
**IUCN Status:** Not ranked

**Physical Description**

The Sherman’s fox squirrel is a large rodent member of the Family Sciuridae. It can reach a length up to 27.6 inches (70 centimeters) and a weight between one to three pounds (0.46-1.4 kilograms). This species has an overall color that varies from black to brown with a black head,
white ears, and a white snout (Florida Natural Areas Inventory 2001, Kantola 1992). Fox squirrels are known for their long bushy tails and their strong hind legs which enables them to leap far.

**Life History**

The diet of Sherman’s fox squirrel primarily consists of longleaf pine seeds and turkey oak acorns, but they will also eat fungi, fruit, and buds.

The Sherman’s fox squirrel typically has two breeding seasons each year. The winter breeding season is from October to February and the summer breeding season is from April to August (Wooding 1997). Most nests are made of Spanish moss, pine needles, twigs, and leaves, while a few nests are made within tree cavities (Kantola and Humphrey 1990). Females average one litter per year with an average of 2.3 offspring per litter (Moore 1957; Wooding 1997). Young are weaned at 90 days and sexual maturity is reached at about nine months.

**Habitat & Distribution**

Sherman’s fox squirrels inhabit open, fire-maintained longleaf pine, turkey oak, sandhills, and flatwoods (Florida Natural Areas Inventory 2001; Kantola 1992, Kantola and Humphrey 1990, Moore 1957). This species can be found throughout the peninsula of Florida and up to central Georgia.

**Threats**

The main threat to the Sherman’s fox squirrel population is the destruction of their habitats. Habitat loss has been significant as it is estimated that only 10-20% of original Sherman’s fox squirrel native habitat is still intact, most of it having been logged, converted to pasture, degraded by lack of fire, or used for agriculture, commercial and residential development. (Bechtold and Knight 1982 as cited in Kantola 1992). Improperly burned longleaf pine communities also affect the fox squirrel’s population as it prevents longleaf pine seeds from properly reproducing in the bare ground. This species also has an increased chance of getting hit by a vehicle due to their typically slow gait (locomotion).

**Conservation & Management**
The Sherman’s fox squirrel is protected as a State Species of Special Concern by Florida’s Endangered and Threatened Species Rule, although more information about the population size and trend is needed to accurately assess the conservation status of this species.

- Biological Status Review (BSR)
- Supplemental Information for the BSR

Other Informative Links

Florida Natural Areas Inventory
The American Society of Mammalogists

References

Florida Natural Areas Inventory. 2001. Field guide to the rare animals of Florida.  
http://www.fnai.org/FieldGuide/pdf/Sciurus_niger_shermani.PDF

Bechtold, W.A. and H.A. Knight. 1982. Florida’s forests. US Department of Agriculture,  
Forestry Service Resource Bulletin SE 62:1-84


Kantola, A.T. and S.R. Humphrey. 1990. Habitat use by Sherman’s fox squirrel (Sciurus niger  

Moore, J.C. 1957. The natural history of the fox squirrel Sciurus niger shermani. Bulletin of  
the American Museum of Natural History. 113:1-71.

Wooding, J.B. 1997. Distribution and population ecology of the fox squirrel in Florida. Ph.D.  