

Abert's Squirrel



Parks &
Open Space

5201 St. Vrain Rd., Longmont CO 80504 303-678-6200 BoulderCountyOpenSpace.org

Background

Abert's squirrels rely on ponderosa pine for most of their life requirements, including food, nesting sites, travel and escape routes. They are co-evolved with ponderosa pine forests. Good habitat for Abert's squirrels contains open, uneven-aged stands, with clusters of even-aged groups connected by canopy corridors to provide secure travel routes. Abert's squirrels promote forest health by dispersing spores of underground fungi that facilitate water and nutrient uptake by the trees and, therefore, increase seedling survival and enhance forest regeneration and growth.



Species Description

The Abert's squirrel is a large tree squirrel with a long, full tail. It has long ear tufts during most of the year, but tufts are usually lacking on adults during July, August, and September.

Their body color can range from gray to brown to black. The predominant color along the Front Range is black. Most brown squirrels have been reported from central Colorado in Elbert, El Paso, and Jefferson Counties. All three color phases can occur in a single litter. In southwestern Colorado, almost all squirrels are salt-and-pepper gray.

Look Alikes: Pine Squirrel

Habitat: Abert's squirrels live in forests of ponderosa pine with minimal understory. High quality habitat for Abert's squirrels consists of an open forest with 150 to 250 trees of various sizes per acre, with connected canopies for aerial movement of the squirrels.

Distribution & Range



<https://nhpbs.org/natureworks/abertssquirrel.htm>

Threats

- *Habitat loss/alteration:* Habitat alteration due to logging, grazing and high intensity wildfires.
- *Climate change:* This is a complicated correlation. Heavy snow cover can be a cause of increased mortality and may be improved by warming trends. However, global warming is also contributing to the loss of quality ponderosa pine habitat due to increased wildfire intensity.
- *Direct predation:* Increased predation can be a result of alteration of habitat (stands with large distances between trees).
- *Forest Practices:* Fuels-reduction treatments often do not account for the habitat requirements of Abert's squirrels. This can be easily accommodated with communication and pre-planning.



Photo credit: BCPOS employee

Management Considerations

Habitat preservation:

- Maintain healthy forests and protect against large catastrophic fires. Ensure connected canopies for travel.

Mapping:

- Identify existing populations.

Prescription for forest restoration:

- Stand densities of 300 to 600 trees per hectare (150-250 per acre), mostly >30 cm (>12 in.) dbh.
- Thinning from below strategies that remove smaller trees and retain larger diameter trees.
- Trees clustered into small, even-aged groups (0.1 to 0.5 ha in size) in uneven-aged forest.
- Stringers of canopy cover between tree clusters to give protection for escape and travel.
- Protection of all existing nest trees within groups of adjacent taller trees.
- Protection of 20 trees per ha used for bark feeding (defined as >20 twigs and clusters on ground under tree).
- Retention of areas of dense canopy cover to form habitat on ground for truffle production.
- Protection of groups of cone-producing trees especially those >19' dbh.

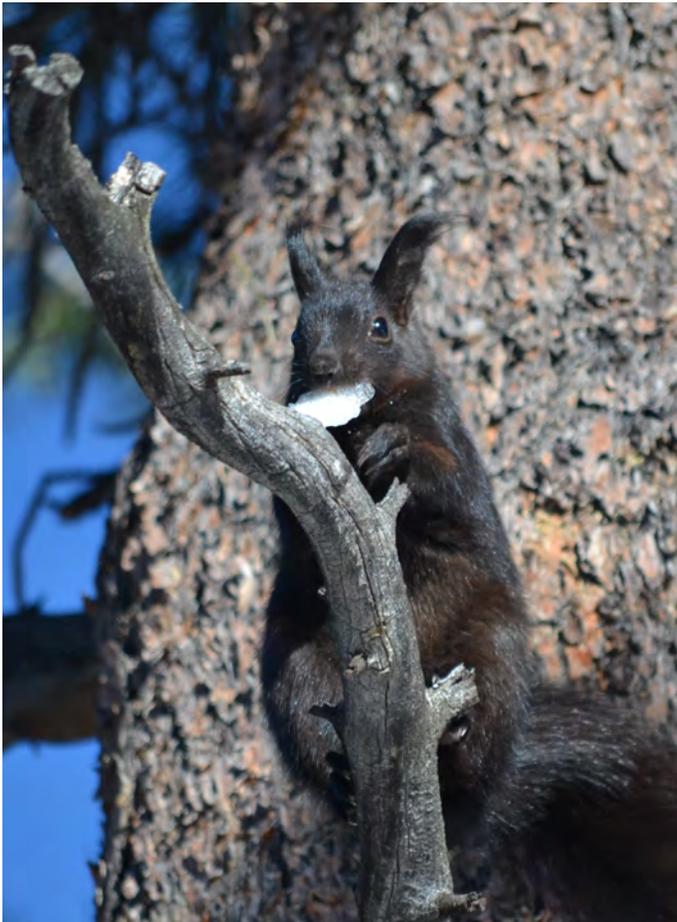


Photo credit: BCPOS employee

2021

The areas displayed in this map indicate known and potential locations of the following species of special concern in Boulder County:

Sciurus aberti



Abert's squirrel

The Abert's Squirrel is a large, tassel-eared tree squirrel. They are listed as a habitat indicator in the Colorado Parks and Wildlife State Wildlife Plan and have a CNHP rating of S5. They are only found in ponderosa pine dominated forests. They are indicators of forest health and facilitate the spread of critical mycorrhizal fungus. They face threats including habitat alteration and increasing human recreation.

 Potential Location

