

Squirrel Hunting for Beginners

Lesson Plan / Instructor Guide

Squirrel Hunting for Beginners

COURSE TITLE: Squirrel Hunting for Beginners

INSTRUCTIONAL GOAL:

Students will learn the basics of how to hunt squirrels and some of the gear and equipment needed, as well as some of the pertinent rules and regulations.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this block of instruction the participant(s) will be able to:

1. Name the four species of squirrels that can be hunted in New Mexico.
2. Name the two hunting techniques used to hunt squirrels.
3. Name the daily bag limit for squirrels.
4. Name two of the seven types of sporting arms that can be used to hunt squirrels.
5. Name one (of the two) names for a female squirrel.
6. Name the time of day a squirrel hunter must stop shooting.
7. Name the opening day of the New Mexico squirrel season.

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS: PowerPoint lecture.

HANDOUTS: New Mexico Small Game Hunting Rules & Information Booklet
<http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/home/publications/>

COURSE DURATION: Approximately 30 minutes.

CURRICULUM REFERENCES:

New Mexico Department of Game and Fish website, Hunting tab, Information by Species, Upland Game, Squirrel.

Biota Information System of New Mexico (BISON-M), <https://bison-m.org/>.

SAFETY CONSIDERATION Don't use loaded firearms in and around the home.

EQUIPMENT, PERSONNEL, AND SUPPLIES NEEDED: Laptop (with presentation uploaded), projector or screen, jump drive with presentation or uploaded to computer, power cords (if needed), extension cords (if needed), New Mexico Small Game Hunting Rules & Information Booklet. <http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/home/publications/>

Squirrel Hunting for Beginners

NOTE: Please check out additional reading material and check out references for more material to look over.

TARGET AUDIENCE: Beginning and novice level squirrel hunters.

COURSE PREREQUISITES: None.

EVALUATION STRATEGY: Written Final Test.

AUTHOR & ORINATION DATE: John Martsh, March 28, 2020.

REVISION / REVIEW DATE(S): N/A.

REVISED / REVIEWED BY: N/A.

CRITERION TEST:

1. Name the four species of squirrels that can be hunted in New Mexico.
2. Name the two hunting techniques used to hunt squirrels.
3. What is the squirrel daily bag limit?
4. Name two of the seven types of sporting arms that can be used to hunt squirrels.
5. Name one (of the two) names for a female squirrel.
6. Name the time of day a squirrel hunter must stop shooting.
7. When is opening day of the New Mexico squirrel season?

CRITERION TEST ANSWERS:

1. Abert's, fox, gray and red.
2. Still hunting and stationary hunting.
3. 8.
4. Shotguns, muzzle-loading shotguns, rim fire firearms, muzzle-loading firearms, bows, crossbows and compressed air pellet gun. (any two)
5. Doe or Sow.
6. ½ hour after sunset.
7. September 1st.

COURSE OUTLINE:

- I. Introduction

- A. Give name and Title.
- II. Give Goals and Objectives.
- III. Species of Squirrels.
- IV. Definitions.
- V. Preseason Scouting.
- VI. Hunting Techniques.
- VII. Clothing.
- VIII. Essential Gear and Equipment .
- IX. Rules and Regulations.
 - 1. Know all the game laws regarding squirrel hunting.
 - 2. Remain ethical.
- X. Conclusion.

COURSE CONTENT:

Course Introduction and Overview

Squirrel Hunting for Beginners. Why should someone become a squirrel hunter? Squirrels are a perfect small game quarry for the novice hunter to pursue. They can be hunted in the fall, before it is too cold and after the summer heat has dissipated. You don't need lots of expensive equipment or clothing to hunt them. Squirrels don't require much physical exertion to hunt and the skills acquired from hunting this shy animal translate perfectly into hunting any game species. The season to hunt them is three months long compared to five days for most big game. Lastly, if prepared correctly, the meat tastes wonderful, is lean and completely hormone free.

Goals and Objectives

My goal for this presentation is to inform the novice and beginning squirrel hunter about the basic techniques needed to harvest their first squirrel. Additionally, students will learn about the gear and equipment needed and some of the rules and regulations.

The objectives are that at the conclusion of this presentation, the student will be able to:

- 1. Name the four species of squirrels that can be hunted in New Mexico.
- 2. Name the two hunting techniques used to hunt squirrels.
- 3. Name the daily bag limit for squirrels.

4. Name two of the seven types of sporting arms that can be used to hunt squirrels.
5. Name one (of the two) names for a female squirrel.
6. Name the time of day a squirrel hunter must stop shooting.
7. Name the opening day of the New Mexico squirrel season.

Instructor Notes:

Show photographs of the different species of squirrels.

Species of Squirrels

Squirrels are extremely shy, territorial and curious creatures. They are most active during daylight hours and communicate with each other with a number of vocalizations. When danger is sensed, a squirrel will twitch its tail as a signaling device to alert other squirrels. A squirrel's lifespan is approximately seven years in the wild.

New Mexico has four species of squirrels that can legally be hunted. These are Abert's, fox, gray and red. Each of these species has unique physical characteristics which make identifying them possible. In addition, each species has specific habitat requirements.

Abert's squirrel, is also known as a tassel-eared squirrel, because of the long tufts of hair growing from the tips of their ears. This distinct looking squirrel has a gray colored body, a white underbelly and a rust colored streak down its back. The tail is grizzled gray color with white on both sides. This squirrel averages 1.3 pounds and a total length (including tail) of 29 inches. They prefer ponderosa pine trees as habitat. Abert's can be found in New Mexico national forests with ponderosas.

Fox squirrels were an introduced species into southeastern New Mexico. This squirrel was named for its color resemblance to a fox. The upper body is brown-yellow and the underbelly is brownish-orange. Its tail is brownish-orange. This squirrel is the heaviest and longest of the four. It averages 1.75 pounds and a total length of 33 inches. The fox squirrel can be found in the Upper Pecos and Black River basins in Chaves, Colfax, Eddy, Lea and Lincoln counties. It prefers oak and pecan trees in New Mexico.

Gray squirrels have small, rounded ears. Their body is gray, with a white underbelly. The tail has a brownish red streak down the middle, with a black border and white tips. This is a medium sized squirrel, averaging 1.4 pounds and 21 inches in length. They live in mountain mid-elevations, in broad leaf riparian habitat. Grays are found in the Gila National Forest in Catron, Grant and Luna counties.

Red squirrels are also known as chickaree or pine squirrels. They have a reddish-brown upper body, with black streaks on either side and a white underbelly. Its tail is brownish-black. This squirrel is by far the smallest of the four species, averaging one-half pound and 12.5 inches in total length. These squirrels are found at high elevations in spruce and fir trees and some other conifers. They can be found in the Sangre De Cristo, San Juan, Sacramento, Capitan, San Mateo and Jemez mountain ranges.

Definitions

Male squirrel- buck, boar
Female squirrel- doe, sow
Baby squirrel- pup, kit, kitten
Squirrel nest- drey

Instructor Notes:

Show photographs of pre-season scouting and two hunting techniques.

Pre-season Scouting

The best time to scout would be a month (or less) before the season starts. It is recommended to scout as many areas around the state as possible, so you have backup locations if your favorite spot is loaded with hunters once the season starts. Look for squirrels bounding across the ground or scampering through trees. Look for sources of food and water. A tip, start scouting at elevations that have the type of trees the species of squirrel you will be hunting prefers as habitat.

When you have selected locations to hunt, research the land statuses. Is it Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Forest Service, a Wildlife Management Area, State Trust Land or private? Once specific land status is determined, talk to whoever patrols that land for tips and special restrictions (Is it only open certain days of the week? Does it close before sunset?). If the land status is private, talk with local landowners. Make sure you obtain written and signed permission to hunt on private land.

Hunting Techniques

There are two types of hunting techniques used to hunt squirrels. The first technique is known as still hunting. In this technique, the hunter moves silently through the forest looking for squirrels on branches, tree trunks, on rocks or scampering across the ground. The hunter walks slowly and methodically, being careful not to step on fallen branches or dead leaves. Any noise could alert a squirrel to the hunter's presence in their world. Shadows and available ground cover are used to conceal a hunter's movements. Every three or four steps the hunter pauses, looking and listening for any type of movement. Once the hunter spots a squirrel, distance is closed by sneaking up on it by using available cover. Even if a squirrel spots you, they will usually jump into the nearest tree and start to climb it. Once a squirrel climbs into a tree it will attempt to stay stationary to hide from the predator after it is quite high. It will continue to look down and climb higher if it can still detect a threat. After the hunter is within range of their sporting arm type, they should attempt a shot. The most humane, efficient shot is a head shot.

The second technique is known as stationary hunting. The hunter sits down in a spot and observes the woods for 10 minutes. If no activity is spotted or heard, the hunter walks fifty yards (or more) away and sits down again. This intermittent sitting and moving is done until a squirrel is seen and able to be shot. Try to sit down in as comfortable position as possible to avoid the noise of repositioning. Sitting with your back to a tree helps prevent sitting fatigue and provides stability. Binoculars can be used to locate the source of distant sounds. Calls can be made if no noise or

Squirrel Hunting for Beginners

movements are detected after five minutes. Squirrels are curious and a chewing or cutting call could cause them to move or vocalize in response to the “fake” squirrel. When a squirrel is detected, if the squirrel is close enough, a shot could be attempted from the sitting position. If it is too far away, the hunter will need to stalk the squirrel.

Clothing

Any weather-appropriate clothing can be worn for squirrel hunting. Almost all of the hiking will be light to moderate, so a comfortable pair of boots is recommended. A cap or hat would work to keep the sun out of your eyes. The only caveat is to avoid bright colors, dark ones are best: blue, green, brown, gray and black.

Instructor Notes:

Show photographs of the different gear used to hunt squirrels. Also, show the equipment needed to clean and store the meat.

Essential Gear and Equipment

There is some essential gear that the hunter needs to take into the field. This includes a sporting arm, ammunition, binoculars with a harness, a compact first aid kit, a squirrel hunting vest, hearing protection, a global positioning system (GPS) unit with extra batteries, two quarters, a hunting license and stamps and a bottle of water. The equipment that can stay in the vehicle includes: game shears, a skinning knife, a cooler and a gallon freezer bag.

Squirrels can be hunted with a large variety of sporting arms. These include: muzzle-loading shotgun, pellet air gun, crossbow, shotgun, bow, muzzleloader and rim fire firearm. Some of the advantages and disadvantages of the different sporting arms types are listed in the table below:

| | Bow | Crossbow | Shotgun | Muzzle-loading Shotgun | Pellet Air Gun | Rim Fire Firearm | Muzzleloader |
|--------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|---|
| Advantage | Silent | Silent | Can shoot moving squirrel | Can shoot moving squirrel | Silent | Accurate | No advantages over other sporting arms |
| Advantage | Multiple slow shots possible | Accurate when equipped with a scope | Multiple shots quickly | Perfect control over size of load | Inexpensive arm and ammunition | Inexpensive ammunition | |
| Disadvantage | Can lose arrow | Can lose bolt | Loud | Loud | Can't shoot moving squirrel | Moderately Loud | Very Loud |
| Disadvantage | Hard to hit small target | Slow and tedious to re-cock | Maximum effective range less than other sporting arms | One shot | Effective stopping power is less than other sporting arms | Can't shoot moving squirrel | One shot, ammunition not size appropriate |

The three most common sporting arms for squirrel hunting are a rim fire firearm, a compressed air gun firing a pellet and a shotgun. The most common rim fire calibers are 17 and 22. A rim fire sporting arm can be a rifle, handgun or revolver. When equipped with a scope, head shots are possible and no meat will be wasted. Compressed air pellet guns can be purchased in a handgun

or rifle; in 177, 22 and 25 calibers. Make sure you purchase one with a minimum muzzle velocity of 700 feet per second. They are silent and inexpensive, but they have less stopping power than the other sporting arms. This is because pellets do not have the aerodynamic efficiency of bullets and, consequently, they lose velocity and kinetic energy rapidly. If selecting a pellet gun for squirrels, go with the heavier 22 and 25 calibers as they will retain velocity more efficiently and have more stopping power than the lighter 177. The most versatile sporting arm for squirrel hunting is a shotgun. A shotgun allows the hunter to shoot at a moving or stationary target. A semi-automatic or pump action would be perfect for multiple, fast shots. The most common gauges for squirrel hunting are twelve, twenty and twenty-eight. Maximum effective range will be about 40 yards, so those squirrels at the tops of the tallest trees may not be reachable with a shotgun. Remember not to shoot a squirrel from too close a distance with a shotgun, as the meat may be ruined since the shot pellets didn't have enough yardage to disperse.

With all the sporting arms available for squirrel hunting, there is an abundance of ammunition. Some ammunition is more accurate and inexpensive than others. In general, arrows and bolts are more expensive than other ammunition, with the cheapest being compressed air gun pellets. Arrows from a bow can be shot up to fifty yards, but it can be difficult to hit small squirrels with pin sights. If a shot is missed, the arrow could be lost, irretrievable or rendered useless for further hunting. A muzzleloader bullet is quite large and even the smallest grain bullet is too large for a squirrel. Headshots would be required to salvage any meat and would be hard to make on such a small target. Also, the sound of a muzzleloader being fired would alert every squirrel within the area. Shotgun shells allow more shooter error. This is because shot pellets spread out with distance and a beginning hunter can shoot at a moving target. A muzzle-loading shotgun allows the hunter to control powder, load weight and shot size to shoot further distances than a standard shotgun shell. .22 rounds can be very accurate, have long range, can penetrate light foliage and are inexpensive. Compressed air pellets are the lightest grain ammunition and have less stopping power than any of the other ammunition. However, since they are silent, multiple shots are possible.

The rifle platform offers more stability than a handgun for rimfire and compressed air pellet guns. Although there are three rim fire bullets in the .22 caliber; short and long rifle, the most common for squirrel hunting is the long rifle. The .22 caliber bullet is preferred over the 17 as it will offer the hunter more grains of lead. A compressed air pellet in 22 or 25 calibers would be perfect for squirrel hunting, just make sure it is classified as a hunting pellet. These usually have pointed and/or ballistic tips. The most popular squirrel shotgun gauges are twelve and twenty and the most economical shotgun shells are 2 ³/₄" , in #8, #7.5 or #6 lead shot.

Binoculars can help a hunter locate a hiding squirrel. Whether still or stationary hunting, a hunter may hear a squirrel in the distance but be unable to see it with the naked eye. With binoculars, the hunter can scan the tree canopy or distant forest floor to see the squirrel that's making the noise. Binoculars are also useful to spot a squirrel that has climbed high into a tree and is proned flat on the trunk or hiding behind branch foliage. A binocular harness alleviates neck fatigue, frees your hands and makes binoculars instantly accessible.

A light, compact first aid kit that can be stowed inside a hunting vest can help with minor injuries, allergic reactions, digestive issues and even temporary survival. At a minimum, this kit should

contain: gauze, tweezers, Benadryl, aspirin, Imodium A-D, water treatment tablets, Band-Aids, lightweight trauma shears, matches, subcompact lighter, needles and surgical thread.

A lightweight hunting vest with lots of pockets is vital for squirrel hunting. These pockets allow the hunter to store ammunition, a bottle of water, GPS unit, a hunting license, a first aid kit, harvested squirrels and a plastic grocery bag to put squirrels inside of before depositing them into a vest pocket.

Hearing protection is crucial when shooting firearms in any situation. If hunting with a compressed air pellet gun, crossbow or bow, hearing protection is not needed. The two types of hearing protection are ear muffs (fit over the ear) and ear plugs (fit inside the ear canal). Ear plugs cancel out more noise, are cheaper and more portable than ear muffs. On the other hand, ear muffs are easier and faster to put on than ear plugs. They also tend to last longer and are harder to lose than ear plugs. Choose the best hearing protection for you.

A Global Positioning System (GPS) unit can keep a hunter from getting lost in the woods. This system works using satellites to triangulate a hunter's position on the ground. The hunter can mark their vehicle as a waypoint before entering the woods and then turn the unit off. When done hunting, the unit is turned back on and it will lead the hunter back to their vehicle. Another feature is sunrise and sunset times from a current location. These can be used to determine when shooting hours start and end. A half hour is subtracted from the sunrise time and a half hour is added to sunset. If the batteries die then the unit is useless. Extra batteries should be stored inside the hunting vest. If the unit breaks or malfunctions, it is useless. It is recommended to stow a compass inside a hunting vest pocket as a backup.

Two quarters should always be kept inside a pants pocket. A hunter can "make" a squirrel call from two quarters. This call can be used when stationary hunting to locate hiding squirrels. Squirrels are curious and territorial. Once a call is made they will usually move or make noise in response to it. The cutting call mimics a squirrel trying to cut a nut in two. It is made by gripping one quarter in the web of the non-dominant hand between the index finger and the thumb. The dominant hand holds the other coin and taps it in the center of the gripped coin. Resonance can be changed by opening or closing the other three fingers on the non-dominant hand. A chewing call imitates a squirrel chewing on a nut. It can be produced by holding the coins ninety degrees to one another and rubbing the ridges on the edge of one coin against the ridges of the other stationary coin. The hunter should call for ten seconds and then wait a minute or two before calling again.

Always have a hunting license and the required stamps with you in the field. These include: a game hunting license and a habitat management and access validation. A habitat stamp is required if hunting on BLM or Forest Service lands.

Water is important when hunting. A plastic bottle of water should be stored in a hunting vest pocket. This will prevent dehydration and once empty, it can be used to store water from a pond, stream or river and purify with the water treatment tablets from your first aid kit.

The following equipment can be kept inside the vehicle. A sharp skinning knife and game shears can make fast work of field cleaning. A squirrel's tail can be cut at the base with game shears and salted on the butt end. Tails can be laid flat and straight to dry. The tail hair can be used to create fishing lures. After the squirrel is gutted and skinned, it can be quartered. No proof of gender is necessary on a squirrel. Make sure to regularly sharpen the knife blade. A dull knife will waste game meat.

Be sure to keep a clean gallon freezer bag inside your vehicle. Once you are done quartering the squirrels, the quarters can be stored inside the freezer bag. This will go into the cooler with frozen ice packs to keep the meat cool.

Instructor Notes:

Show the slide with a Top Ten list of rules and regulations.

Rules and Regulations

All of the rules and regulations pertinent to squirrel hunting won't be listed here, because there are too many. It is each hunters' responsibility to know all of the laws and rules prior to hunting any game species. Studying the current small game proclamation and having a copy of it in the field will allow the hunter to know the rules and follow them. I will list a few of the major rules and regulations, but make sure you know all of them before going squirrel hunting.

1. Squirrels may be taken with shotguns firing shot, muzzle-loading shotguns, rim-fire and muzzle-loading firearms, bows, crossbows and compressed air gun firing a pellet.
2. Shooting hours are ½ hour before sunrise to ½ hour after sunset, unless otherwise noted.
3. Anyone taking small game must transport the edible portions of the meat from the field for human consumption.
4. Statewide squirrel season is Sept. 1 through Nov. 30.
5. Bag limit is eight squirrels per day per hunter, possession limit of 16 per hunter.
6. Season dates can change year to year, so be sure to check current proclamation prior to hunting.

It is unlawful to:

7. Hunt while under the influence of alcohol or other intoxicants, including medical marijuana.
8. Shoot at game on, from or across, any paved, graded or maintained public road or within the fenced right-of-way of any paved, graded or maintained public road.
9. Shoot at protected species or artificial wildlife from a motor vehicle.
10. Hunt or shoot at any animal from an aircraft or drone or cause any non-domesticated animal to move from its place of rest or change its direction of travel.

It is encouraged to talk to fellow hunters if you see them attempting to violate any game laws. This includes asking them to pick up any litter they might have accumulated while hunting. Most hunters aren't intentionally trying to break game laws, but instead are unaware of specific ones.

Remember that just because something is legal, doesn't make it ethical. For instance, shooting squirrels at more than fifty yards with a shotgun, although legal, would be unethical. This is because the hunter is more likely to maim the squirrel than kill it.

Conclusion

Even though it isn't mandatory for individuals 18 and older, a Hunter Education class is strongly encouraged for everyone to take. This class will teach the beginner how to safely operate different types of firearms, how to hunt legally and ethically, how to cross fences and other barriers alone and with a friend and vital shot placement on different game animals. These are just a few of the many topics that will be covered in a hunter education class.

Remember to have fun squirrel hunting. Once you have learned how to squirrel hunt, take someone else who has never been hunting with you to teach them how. Squirrel hunting is the perfect type of hunting to teach a beginner. The amount of gear needed is inexpensive and minimal, squirrels are typically abundant, their shy nature make a hunter work to harvest them and squirrels are some of the tastiest table fare if cooked correctly.

Since there are four species of squirrels found in New Mexico, competitive types can try for a "Squirrel Slam". This could mean competing against yourself to harvest all four species within one or two seasons, or competing against fellow hunters to see who can accomplish a Slam first.

Post Test

1. Name the four species of squirrels that can be hunted in New Mexico.
2. Name the two hunting techniques used to hunt squirrels.
3. What is the squirrel daily bag limit?
4. Name two of the seven types of sporting arms that can be used to hunt squirrels.
5. Name one (of the two) names for a female squirrel.
6. Name the time of day a squirrel hunter must stop shooting.
7. When is opening day of the New Mexico squirrel season?