

# **Results of the 2000-2001 Illinois Squirrel Hunter Survey**

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**Craig A. Miller  
Program Leader and Principal Investigator  
Human Dimensions Research Program  
Illinois Natural History Survey  
607 East Peabody Drive  
Champaign, IL 61820  
(217)333-7483**

**Report prepared by  
Craig A. Miller, William L. Anderson  
Linda K. Campbell, and Jessica A. Yeagle  
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**Brent Manning, Director  
Illinois Department of Natural Resources**

**Tim Hickmann  
Federal Aid Coordinator**

**Jeffrey Ver Steeg  
Chief, Division of Wildlife  
Program Development**

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## **2000-2001 Illinois Squirrel Hunter Survey**

### **Objective**

To survey 1 group of upland game (squirrel, pheasant, quail, dove, or other) hunters annually to determine their activities, harvest, characteristics, attitudes, and opinions in Illinois.

### **Methods**

A random sample of 3,000 hunters was selected from purchasers of 2000 Illinois Resident Hunting Licenses and Habitat Stamps. Hunters were mailed a questionnaire addressing hunter activities and harvest for the 2000 license year, as well as specific attitudes toward squirrel hunting in Illinois. The questionnaire was followed 14 days later with a postcard reminder to nonrespondents. Hunters not responding to either the first mailing or postcard were sent a second questionnaire 14 days after the postcard reminder. Nonrespondents to the second questionnaire were sent a second postcard reminder 14 days following the second questionnaire.

### **Results**

A total of 2,078 hunters (74%) responded to the survey. Approximately one-third (37%) of hunters hunted squirrels during the 1999 license year (1999-2000 seasons). Of those hunters who hunted squirrels, 92% did so as the main species of the hunt. Approximately half (49%) of hunters reported their squirrel hunting efforts had decreased during the 5 years prior to this study (1995-2000). Hunters expressed mixed perspectives on squirrel populations: 11% felt populations were lower, 33% thought populations were the same, and 32% believed populations were higher in 2000 than in the 5 years prior to the survey. Approximately one-quarter of hunters (24%) were unsure about population levels.

Hunters varied as to when they hunted squirrels. Most hunters (66%) hunted squirrels during the period September 1 – October 31. Fewer hunters (15%) stated most of their squirrel hunting occurred after October 31, and 19% responded that most hunting was in August. Squirrel hunters were either accompanied by family (n = 491) or alone (n=482) while hunting, followed by friends (n = 325), and 115 stated they hunted with one or more of the choices provided. A majority of hunters (56%) were not accompanied by youths during their hunt.

Most hunters (53%) reported they would support a squirrel season in May if the season would have no effect on squirrel populations. Most frequent reasons were “Extended hunting opportunities” (n=622) and “Give me something to hunt during spring” (n=550). Hunters opposed to a spring season cited “Present season long enough” (n=538) and “It’s not part of our hunting tradition in Illinois” (n=178) as primary reasons for opposing a spring season. Slightly more than one-third (37%) reported they would hunt during the spring season if it was offered.

When asked to rate the quality of squirrel hunting in Illinois, the most frequent response (40%) was “Good,” followed by “Excellent” (28%). Very or extremely important reasons to hunt squirrels included “To spend time outdoors in summer and early fall” (59%), “To pass along skills to young hunters” (49%), and “To scout for deer hunting” (45%).

## Discussion

Squirrel hunting is still enjoyed by a substantial segment of Illinois hunters. Hunter effort has declined for approximately half of Illinois hunters during 1995-2000. Hunters were in mixed in their opinions of changes in squirrel populations during the 5 years prior to this study (1995-2000). Hunters hunt squirrels alone or with family members. Hunters are mixed on their support for a May squirrel season, and approximately one-third would take part in the season if it was offered.

1 & 1a. Did you hunt gray or fox squirrels during the 2000-01 season?

	Number of Respondents	Percent Response
Yes	776	37%
No	1302	63%

If "yes," how did you hunt them most often?

As the main species of the hunt	690	92%
Incidental to other species	62	8%

2. How has your squirrel hunting effort changed in the past 5 years?

Hunting Effort	Number of Respondents	Percent Response
Increased	133	8%
Stayed the same	754	44%
Decreased	818	48%

3. In your opinion, how have squirrel populations changed in the past 5 years?

Squirrel Populations	Number of Respondents	Percent Response
Lower	193	11%
Same	598	33%
Higher	568	32%
Not sure	427	24%

4. In what part of the small game season did most of your squirrel hunting take place?

	Number of Respondents	Percent Response
August	228	19%
Between September 1 and October 31	799	66%
After October 31	187	15%

5. Which of the following best describes those who usually accompany you squirrel hunting?

	Number of Respondents
Family	491
I usually hunt alone	482
Friends	325
Co-workers	10
Neighbors	5
Two or more of the above choices	115

6. Do any of the hunters who accompany you squirrel hunting include youths?

	Number of Respondents	Percent Response
Yes	608	44%
No	766	56%

7. If there was no effect on the population would you favor a season in May for squirrels?

	Number of Respondents	Percent Response
Yes	934	53%
No	829	47%

8. Please give the reason you would favor a May season for squirrels.

Reasons to Favor a May Squirrel Season	Number of Respondents
Extended hunting opportunities	622
Give me something to hunt during spring	550
Other <sup>a</sup>	98

<sup>a</sup>See Appendix H.

9. Please give the reason you would not favor a May season for squirrels.

Reasons not to Favor a May Squirrel Season	Number of Respondents
Present season is long enough	538
It's never been done before	41
It's not part of our hunting tradition in Illinois	178
Other <sup>a</sup>	248

<sup>a</sup>See Appendix H.

10. If a season for squirrels was offered in May, would you take part in it?

	Number of Respondents	Percent Response
Yes	674	37%
No	666	36%
Not sure	493	27%

11. How do you rate the quality of squirrel hunting in Illinois?

Quality of Squirrel Hunting	Number of Respondents	Percent Response
Poor	34	2%
Fair	264	15%
Good	727	40%
Excellent	517	28%
Don't know	275	15%

12. How important are the following as reasons why you hunt squirrels?

Reason	Not Important	Slightly Important	Moderately Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
To harvest squirrels to eat	20%	18%	28%	21%	13%
To extend my hunting opportunities earlier in the season	21%	19%	33%	20%	7%
To spend time outdoors in summer and early fall	9%	7%	25%	36%	23%
To scout for deer hunting	21%	11%	23%	25%	20%
To practice my shooting skills	24%	14%	25%	23%	14%
To spend time with other hunters	28%	15%	25%	20%	12%
To pass along skills to young hunters	22%	11%	18%	24%	25%