

# *If it isn't one thing, it's a squirrel*

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For those who haven't flown the coop, February is the waiting-around month. The hype of the holidays has faded, and spring is a ways off. The Super Bowl is over, and whether our team won or not, we all had our favorite commercials. Our other February distraction, the Westminster Dog Show, biggest dog show in the U.S. with 2,500 dogs, has come and gone.

So I look for my own entertainment in the foibles and folly of daily life. You have to laugh at the predicaments in life; otherwise, where would we be? Down in the dumps a lot, I suspect. Take groundhogs and squirrels for instance.

The world's most famous furry forecaster, groundhog Punxsutawney Phil, didn't see his shadow this month, something that's only happened 16 times since 1887 according to the "Inner Circle" of Punxsutawney Groundhog Club in Pennsylvania. Legend has it that Groundhog Day is rooted in a German superstition that says if a hibernating animal casts a shadow on February 2, winter will last another six weeks. If no shadow is seen, spring is supposed to come early. The predictions of an early spring come as a relief to most of us in the United States, if not the world, with almost all regions having had their share of one of the coldest, wettest, stormiest, most hazardous winters on record.

In my research, I discover that squirrels and groundhogs are both part of the family *Sciuridae*, which means they are small-to medium-sized **rodents**. I try to emphasize that last word to a certain someone in my household who feeds them and enjoys their antics.

If squirrels are living in your attic, an effective deterrent is to place a battery-powered radio tuned to an all-talk station at a high volume near the den. I'm not sure what talk-show host works best. Another suggestion is to visit the attic several times a day and make noise and move things around.

That wouldn't work for me since I have to kick the attic door shut with my foot after cramming in the last of the stuff despite my constant efforts to donate to the local Hope Chest.

If there's a squirrel trapped in your chimney, instructions are to never smoke squirrels out, but instead, lower a thick rope so the squirrel can climb out. Sounds labor intensive to me. And what about the claustrophobic squirrel? Other hints include luring the squirrel out with nuts near the household exit, but only if the exit is clearly visible for the squirrel. Guess that means a lighted or perhaps blinking EXIT sign.

My research on groundhogs says they "manage to look sweet and dumpy" at the same time. I don't know many groundhogs, so I can't say. The methods for getting groundhogs to move on from under the shed or deck are similar—the all-talk station at a high volume or a battery-powered light shining toward the burrow to encourage the family to move along.

I helped a squirrel move along recently, right into his next life. It began when I started the car one morning and heard a kerplunk. Or maybe it was more of a thud. Then the power steering went out. Seems a squirrel had decided to take a nap on the engine. He probably didn't know what hit him in the noggin—one turn of the key, and he was a goner. No chance to listen to talk-radio for that feller. But one thing leads to another, as they say. First it was the tow truck backing up the hill for the car because, according to the garage invoice I later received, the power steering belt was "contaminated with squirrel." Then it was an overnight garage stay for the car while waiting for belts to be delivered the next day. The alternator belt was also "contaminated by squirrel." A couple days of inconvenience, a hefty tow and repair bill and one squirrel was off the premises.

Meanwhile, forecaster Punxsutawney Phil, who's back in a climate-controlled room at the Punxsutawney Library, predicts an early spring. But Phil lives on the East Coast, so what he does he know! All we know for sure is that spring comes--eventually.