

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Carolina Northern Flying Squirrel

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

2013 marks the 40th anniversary of the Endangered Species Act, an anniversary we're marking by taking a closer look at some of the endangered species of the Southern Appalachians.

For wildlife biologists, winter is often the down time of the year – a time to compile data from the year's field work and set about the laborious, and indoor, task of writing reports. However, for people who track a handful of animals, winter is time to get out and about.

A group of biologists trek along a snowed-over dirt road near the top of a ridge, then turns off onto a side trail. The Southern Appalachians are home to two species of flying squirrel. The southern flying squirrel is the far more common of the two, occurring at lower, and warmer elevations, and occasionally finding their way into out buildings and even homes. However, going up into the high elevations, where these biologists are hiking, brings you into the habitat of the endangered Carolina northern flying squirrel.

During winter, Carolina northern flying squirrels remain active, but find shelter in cavities, and artificial nest boxes. During the winter, biologists check these nest boxes, measuring and tagging squirrels they find. Over time, this can provide insight into the health of a population. Recent technology allows biologists to use microphones to pick up the squirrels' calls, making survey efforts even easier. All evidence from these efforts indicates stable squirrel populations for this endangered species.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.