

had been talking about them for many years, but this was the first time she received one.

Swinimer's big question is what she's going to do with her small gray charge. Because it has never seen another of its kind, it may not be releasable. If it is able to be set free, where? It is not at present a legal animal in Nova Scotia or any other province.

The Eastern Gray is officially a non-resident, according to biologist Mike O'Brien of the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources. He says the squirrel's status has not changed for his department. It is still considered an alien species not established in Nova Scotia, and Natural Resources has in the past trapped out Gray Squirrel pockets in several communities. O'Brien believes any found in the Annapolis Valley can be traced to Canadian Armed Forces staff moving from Ontario to Greenwood.

There is a very major potential problem with a non-native species establishing itself, says O'Brien. Many animal diseases that Nova Scotia really does not want are sitting on

its doorstep, so any time an animal is imported, it brings with it a risk. Raccoon rabies is as close as a Maine ferry terminal, he says.

O'Brien's warning was true when Eastern Gray

Squirrels were introduced to Europe. They are carriers of a deadly Squirrel pox virus which is a leading factor in the disappearance of European Red Squirrels in much of the British Isles.

Hyunh thinks the Gray Squirrel's arrival in Nova Scotia may be a natural extension of its range. Originally a deciduous forest resident of southern Ontario and the north-eastern United States, it spread east and west as land use and climate changed. The Gray Squirrel is now established in New



Brunswick, with the Moncton area, just across the border from Nova Scotia, a recent hot spot.

Anecdotal evidence collected over several years by Jim Wolford, a retired Acadia professor now with the Blomidon Naturalist Society, was an important supplement to his animal specimen examinations, Hyunh says. Wolford's records show reliable sightings in Wolfville, Kentville, Berwick, Middleton, and Kingston. The work of Hyunh and Wolford is more than enough proof for Rick Whitman, Blomidon Naturalist Society president.

"As far as we are concerned, the Eastern Gray Squirrel is now an established species in Nova Scotia," he says.

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