

# Squirrels in the Chimney

Provide a way out for a trapped squirrel

Adapted from the book Wild Neighbors



Use noise to coax a squirrel in a fireplace back above the damper—hanging a rope down the chimney lets him climb out. Susumu Kishihara



If a squirrel cannot or will not go back up the flue, use a humane live trap to apprehend him and return him outdoors. Craig Elliot



When preparing to give a trapped squirrel her freedom be sure have a quick and easy escape route planned, because she will be ready to leave. Laura Mezoff Christy



Once all squirrels are out of your chimney, have a cap installed to prevent any future mishaps. John Griffin/The HSUS

Sometimes squirrels enter chimneys and are unable to climb back out, forcing them to try to get out from a fireplace or basement ducts.

Assume that the squirrel you hear scrambling in a chimney is trapped, unless you've got clear evidence she is able to climb back out on her own.

Never try to smoke a squirrel (or any other animal) out of a chimney—a trapped animal or babies too young to climb out may be killed. If the squirrel is not trapped, try to encourage her on her way with noise.

Never try use smoke or fire to drive a squirrel out of a chimney!

## Provide an escape route

Try hanging a three-quarter-inch or thicker rope down the chimney to give her a way to escape. Be sure to tie one end of the rope to the top of the chimney before lowering the other end, and make certain that the rope is long enough to reach the damper or smoke shelf. Don't lower anything into the chimney that you can't easily retrieve. The squirrel will climb up the rope and escape, usually within a few (daylight) hours. Once you're certain that the squirrel has escaped, remove the rope and cap the chimney with a commercially made cap.

## Make some noise

If a squirrel is actually in the fireplace itself (behind glass or a screen), try making enough noise to scare her back up above the damper. Then close the damper and follow the escape route directions above.

## Catch and release

If the squirrel cannot or will not leave the fireplace, the next best option is a suitable live trap.

Before opening the doors of the fireplace to set the trap, close any interior doors in the room and open an exterior door or window in line of sight from the fireplace, if possible, so the squirrel has a way out. If the squirrel gets out of the fireplace, do not chase it.

Bait a humane live trap with peanut butter and set it very carefully inside the fireplace. Most squirrels will retreat to a back corner of the fireplace as the doors are opened and stay there if you place the live trap slowly and quietly just inside the doors.

Close the doors and leave the room to wait for the squirrel to enter the trap.

Take the squirrel outside and carefully open the trap door while standing behind the trap. The squirrel will usually bolt immediately out of the trap.

If not, you can wedge the door open or tie it open with a zip tie and stand back to let the squirrel leave on her own.

### Put a cap on it

The chance of that squirrel returning to the chimney is slim since she was probably trapped in there by accident. But have a cap installed as soon as it is practical to do so. If you're a do-it-yourselfer, be sure to purchase an approved chimney cap, and follow installation directions carefully to prevent future visits of the animal kind. Ask a local certified chimney sweep about any local building codes regarding cap installation, and check these [recommendations for good venting practices](#).

### Call a professional

If more immediate and direct intervention is required to evict squirrels, then we strongly recommend [hiring professional assistance](#). Evicting squirrels can be difficult. There are potential safety risks to the homeowner and humane concerns for the squirrels if the eviction isn't done properly.

### Relocation isn't the answer

Live-trapping squirrels and relocating them to "the woods," where they will live happily ever after, is not the ideal solution to local problems. Studies show that few squirrels may survive the move. And when a squirrel is removed from a yard, another squirrel will usually move right in.

### Public health concerns

Squirrels can harbor pathogens (such as salmonella) that may be harmful to people, but transmission has rarely, if ever, been documented. And although [rabies](#) can occur in squirrels, as in any mammal, there is no documented case of any person getting rabies from a squirrel.

[More squirrel problems and solutions »](#)

### Resources

- » Purchase a copy of *Wild Neighbors*; the go-to guide for useful, humane solutions to conflicts with wildlife.
- » If you live within the D.C. Metro Area, take advantage of our [wildlife conflict resolution service](#).
- » Kim Long, *Squirrels: A Wildlife Handbook* (Johnson Books, 1995)
- » Michael Steele and John Koprowski, *North American Tree Squirrels* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 2003)