

SQUIRRELS ATTACK!

Behind masks of innocence, some campus squirrels harbor violent natures

By Jesse Wright
THE BATTALION

There are residents on the A&M campus who do not worry about grades, tuition or parking. They spend their days running around with buddies and scurrying up trees.

The University often frowns on this type of mischievous behavior and disregard for scholastic advancement. Surprisingly, these residents are loved and adored.

"They're so cute and friendly," said Leslie Harford, a sophomore business major, as she watched two squirrels chase each other around a tree in front of the Harrington Educational Center. But behind squirrels' cute and friendly facade lay vicious and cruel intentions.

In the past three years, there were not one, but two documented cases of squirrel attacks on campus. This far outnumbers the frequency of tiger and bear attacks at A&M in recent years. This staggering statistic easily makes squirrels A&M's number-one feral threat.

The first reported case of viciousness occurred in January 1999, when a victim fed a squirrel and was bit on his right thumb.

All seemed peaceful until early November 2000, when the squirrels claimed another victim. This time the unsuspecting victim tried to trap a squirrel. As he attempted to rescue the adorable animal, he was bitten on his right index finger.

Both victims of these attacks recovered from injuries sustained.

These are the only two cases on record with the University Police Department. But from these two cases, it is evident that squirrels will be the hand that feeds them or a helping hand.

However, these are only the documented cases. Who knows how many attacks are unreported and viewed as "just squirrels being squirrels?" Should students flee from these rodents in fear for the welfare of their precious digits?

Assistant Professor of Wildlife Ecology and Management Dr. Roel Lopez said students do not have much to fear.

"If threatened, squirrels would show signs of aggression," Lopez said. "But they would have to be pretty uncomfortable to attack a human."

Lopez said he has not heard of any incidences of squirrel attacks on campus, although he said he was once bit by a squirrel.

So what should students do if they find themselves bit by one of these acorn-hoarding hooligans?

"The first step is to quickly wash the area clean with warm soapy water," said Dr. John Focke, a physician at Beutel Health Center.

Focke said victims should watch the area closely for infection during the next two to three days. If red streaks or swelling occur, Focke said to seek medical attention.

"Most problems that occur from puncture wounds, such as a bite, don't come from the bite itself, but from secondary infection," he said.

Focke said the danger associated with a cat bite is far worse than that of a squirrel bite.

"A cat bite is a hundred times worse than a squirrel bite due to all the different bacteria involved," Focke said.

People voluntarily own cats. Some allow cats to live in their homes and sleep in their beds. So is the squirrel risk really that great? Can students and faculty safely co-inhabit an entire campus



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with these furry, yet ferocious squirrels?

It is a risk Justin Goldsmith, a senior kinesiology major, is willing to take.

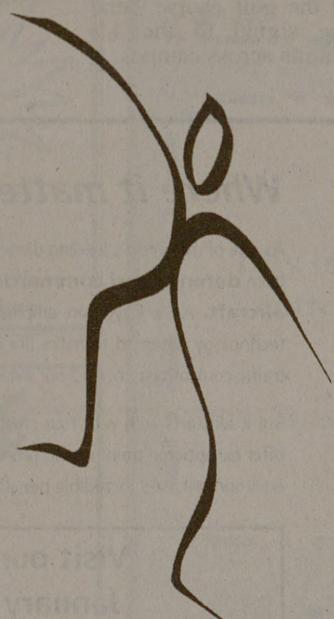
"Sometimes I'll just sit and watch the squirrels until I have to go to my next class," Goldsmith said. "It's relaxing to watch them run

and jump all over the place."

Perhaps, the between-class amusement outweighs the danger of brutal squirrel attacks. However, the danger exists and until students and faculty learn to fear and respect their fellow furry campus residents, the danger will not go away.

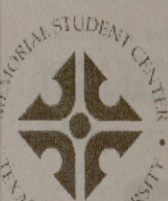
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