

## BIG CYPRESS FOX SQUIRREL

*Sciurus niger avicennia*

**Order:** Rodentia  
**Family:** Scuriidae  
**FNAI Ranks:** G5T2/S2  
**U.S. Status:** none  
**FL Status:** Threatened



**Description:** A large (22 - 26 in. = 550 - 660 mm) tree squirrel with variable dorsal fur color. The most common color phase has a black head and dorsal fur with buff sides and belly, white nose and ears, and buff and black tail (see photograph). Other forms may be nearly all black with white muzzle and ears. Few individuals are black and silver. Tail is long, nearly the length of the head and torso.

**Similar Species:** Gray squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) is smaller (less than 19 in. = 500 mm).

**Habitat:** A variety of forested habitats with open to moderately dense understory and shrub cover. A mosaic of pine flatwoods, cypress swamps, and hardwood hammocks is ideal to provide year-round food and cover.

**Seasonal Occurrence:** Active year-round.

**Florida Distribution:** South of the Caloosahatchee River.

**Range-wide Distribution:** Same as Florida distribution.

**Conservation Status:** Largest protected population may be within Big Cypress National Preserve. Populations are partially protected by Corkscrew Swamp (Audubon Society) and Picayune Strand State Forest. Extensive rangeland and swamps in private ownership provide important habitat for the Big Cypress fox squirrel.

**Protection and Management:** Burn pine communities every two to five years (April - July, if possible) to maintain open conditions. Allow fires to burn into cypress and other wetland communities to produce broad, diverse transitions between communities. Leave scattered pines and oak trees in rangeland to provide food and cover.

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References: Brown 1997, Hall 1981, Humphrey (ed.) 1992, Whitaker 1996.



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