

# outrageously outdoors

## Ole' Stumpy



By Steve Gilliland  
**I** have a love-hate relationship with squirrels, also known as limb chickens or tree bacon in our neck of the woods. They taunt our two little pups from the top of my back fence or from the roof of our neighbor's garage, and work them into an absolute frenzy. They hang upside-down from their heels on the side of the tree, just out of reach and chatter away as if to say "Come and get me you yappy little mongrels!" Squirrels are not to be trifled with and

can give a nasty bite, but just once I wish my dumb mutts would learn to work together and snag one.

Like maybe one pup could prance around the tree with a big grin on its face, clutching an acorn in its teeth, luring the little bird-feeder-vandal near the ground, while the other pup sneaks up from the other side, pounces on its back and cleans it off the side of the tree. But it would be just my luck the squirrel would weigh more than the dog, and instead of crumpling to the ground with the pooch on its back, it would head for the top of



the tree with the pooch on its back. At that point I don't know which would be worse, the hapless hound hangin' on to end up somewhere in the treetops, or fallin' off somewhere over the middle of the yard.

Pesky as they are, I know of no other wild critter in the U.S. more pampered than the squirrel. I have to admit squirrels are fun to watch as they roll around inside those glass jar feeders. I've always wanted to catch a squirrel inside one and run out and screw the lid on before it could flee. We buy corn to feed them, and then buy feeders to hold the corn. We teach them to take peanuts from our hands, and I even heard of someone who had taught the little beggars to tap on the front door when they wanted a handout. Last year at the fair we bought a rig that suspends two ears of corn side-by-side above the ground, forcing them to jump up and hang onto the corn while they get a mouthful.

Lately a squirrel with only half a tail has become a regular at our new feeder; we've named it "Ole' Stumpy." We thought at first that Stumpy was a male, but when they hang spread-eagled from the corn with both right feet on one ear and both left on the other and spin around in the process looking like a centerfold for PlaySquirrel, it becomes fairly simple to examine them anatomically. There are no bulging body parts on Stumpy's underside so we've deemed her a girl. We can only guess at how Stumpy lost the end of her tail. Perhaps at Stumpy's last home, some yappy little mongrel did get a piece of her, proudly wagging its tail as it showed its master nothing but the back half of Stumpy's tail.

Or maybe Stumpy was one of those squirrels that someone taught to knock on the front door for a treat. We have lots of seniors in our little town, and I can see it all now; old Mrs. Dinglemire up the

street who's partly deaf and mostly blind hears a tapping sound at her front door and when she opens it, there stands Ole' (Not Yet) Stumpy. Now Ole' (Not Yet) Stumpy looks like a rat to her, so she grabs her broom and swings it at the innocent squirrel, entangling its thick tail in the broom, so when she lifts the broom the squirrel comes with it and . . . well you get the picture—somehow in the melee the little panhandler's tail gets snapped off in the door and Ole' (not yet) Stumpy becomes Ole' Stumpy.

I did a little research on Ole' Stumpy's tail dilemma on a website named "The Squirrel Board" (I can't make this stuff up!). It seems Ole' Stumpy's not alone and squirrel tails are made so they will "deglove" or snap off if a predator has hold of it. The jury seemed to still be out as to whether it would ever grow back and Stumpy would be whole again. The squirrel lovers on that site are out of my league. One guy said "If you're feeding peanuts to your squirrels make sure they are roasted . . . I feed mine chopped almonds because they are healthier than peanuts." (Really; sounds like his squirrels eat better than I do.) He goes on to say "Thanksgiving week we fed them almonds, cashews, pistachios, walnuts, chestnuts and hazelnuts for a variety." I have to admit that would make for some tasty squirrel if you roasted 'em while they were still full of nuts.

Now even though Cousin Eddy from the National Lampoon movie "Christmas Vacation" says squirrels are high in cholesterol, they are not. Bentonville, Arkansas, headquarters of Walmart, has an annual World Champion Squirrel Cook-off that draws TV crews, executive chefs and visitors from around the globe. Their theme is "Squirrel — it's for Supper," and they offer "organic tree-to-table squirrel" in dishes like squirrel piz-

za and squirrel flavored ice cream. And are you aware there is actually an organization called "Squirrels Unlimited?" (SQU for short). Its mission statement reads: "SQU is dedicated to the recognition and promotion of the squirrel as one of mankind's greatest gifts."

There is also a market for squirrel tails. Fishing lure manufacturer Mepps in Wisconsin actually pays for squirrel tails because they seem to work better as skirts on their fishing lures than any other product they have tried. Depending on the species of tails you send, they pay between 8 and 16 cents apiece for batches under 100, and 22 to 26 cents apiece for lots over 1,000. On their website they caution "Mepps is only interested in 'Recycling' tails from squirrels harvested for the table. We do not advocate taking squirrels strictly for their tails." They say that once they receive the tails, members of their experienced team will grade the tails as premium, average or unusable. Sorry Stumpy, I guess you're out of luck there, too. Maybe she purposely "degloved" her own tail to keep me from being tempted!

You know, now that I've written all this about Stumpy, I feel kinda' bad for her, busted snapped-off tail and all. I mean, she's gotta' be self conscious enough already without me dissin' her like this. Now that I think about it, I haven't seen her around for awhile. Maybe she's holed up in her nest having little Stumpys, or maybe she got run off by the rest of the local nut munchers—or maybe she just couldn't take the shame anymore and decided to end it all by throwing herself in front of a school bus. I knew I should have gotten her counseling, and given everything people do for squirrels these days, I probably could've found that, too!

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