

TREE SQUEAK

(CBC Radio Interview by Telephone from Frederickton, NB)

Interviewer: Ever heard of a tree squeak? Well on foggy nights of the full moon you might find them moving about in the trees near Pokomoonshine Lake in Maine. Jack Dudley lives on the shores of the lake and he's on the line with us now. Mr. Dudley, what is a tree squeak?

Jack Dudley: It's a small mammal. They run from the large - the largest I've ever seen probably has been about nine inches long counting the tail. They run from there down to probably six inches and a half. Just like all other mammals, they vary in size.

Interviewer: What does it look like?

Jack Dudley: Well, probably the closest thing between them - would possibly be a flying squirrel. But, they are not a squirrel. They don't have legs. They have suction cups.

Interviewer: Suction cups.

Jack Dudley: On the sides of their bellies and by the use of the suction cups, they're able to travel around in the trees. They cannot travel on the ground.

Interviewer: Why not?

Jack Dudley: If one falls on the ground he dies of starvation. Can't move. They can travel about in the trees. That's one of the reasons the number of them is so restricted because their range is restricted. They're in the hard woods. Usually find them on a hard wood ridge. But, they are - they're not very numerous. I've seen very few in my lifetime.

Interviewer: About how many are there, do you think?

Jack Dudley: Well, I would say, I would say they probably should be described as an endangered species. We have them here in Eastern Washington County - a few - and I know that you have them in southern New Brunswick, over in Charlotte County.

Interviewer: Gee, I've never heard of them there.

Jack Dudley: The Museum of Natural History in Saint John, they have a publication they put out, and they had an article in that about a year ago on them.

Interviewer: When did you first discover tree squeaks?

Jack Dudley: Oh-h, I've known about them probably 25 years or more.

Interviewer: Has anyone else ever seen one?

Jack Dudley: Well, I have a mounted specimen here.

Interviewer: Oh-h.

Jack Dudley: I had three brought to me one winter back here a number of years ago. A Micmac Indian, lives over in back of St. Stephens brought them in to me. He found them on the ground in the snow and of course they were frozen solid. Nothing in their digestive tracks. They'd starved to death. And, I mounted all three of them. And, I have one specimen here. The other two I gave away.

Interviewer: How many of them have you seen in 25 years?

Jack Dudley: Oh, in my life - I haven't seen more than probably eight or ten in my lifetime.

Interviewer: How long have you been cataloging things like tree squeaks?

Jack Dudley: All my life.

Interviewer: All your life?

Jack Dudley: Yes. All my life. I was well acquainted with Colonel Ritchie up in Frederickton and I knew Bruce Wright who used to be the director of the wildlife station there, Northeastern Wildlife Station. I've been in this stuff since I was a kid.

Interviewer: Has this been a hobby or a full time job for you?

Jack Dudley: Oh, no, hobby. I'm a retired attorney.

Interviewer: I'd certainly like to see one of these tree squeaks. I guess I'm going to have to get down to Charlotte County and take a look.

Jack Dudley: Well, I have one here. Doug Dawe who is one of your foresters over in New Brunswick, he's seen it. The only way they can get from one tree to another is after you have a wind storm or something and there are wind falls, they can cross over on the fallen tree - cross on the fallen tree from one tree to the next. And, then at some times in the summer during the hot weather when you have a lot of humidity in the air and you get a full moon they can travel from one tree to another on moon beams.

Interviewer: (Laughs)

Jack Dudley: You may think that's foolish, but it isn't. They have developed a train over in Munich, Germany which is in the experimental stages, and that train travels on a layer of air. Surely if a train can travel on a layer of air, a tree squeak which only weighs three or four ounces probably, the biggest ones, if they weigh that much, surely they can travel on a moonbeam.

Interviewer: Sort of like hover-craft, eh?

Jack Dudley: Yes. You go out on any of your lakes or ponds and you will see all kind of insects walking on the water. They don't break through. Mother Nature has provided a good many things which a lot of people don't - they develop something scientifically and they think they've done something new. Mother Nature's been doing it for years.

Interviewer: Why are tree squeaks an endangered species? Does someone trap them for the fur?

Jack Dudley: Well, they live primarily on the hard wood ridges and the hard wood ridges used to be - wasn't much demand for hard wood, but now of course the paper companies, they're using hard wood now to manufacture paper and they're using it to manufacture veneer - plywood. So there's more demand. And, then of course in recent years, we've had several of these insect epidemics. We had one here a few years ago that killed all the beech off. Same thing as you've got now in the spruce. Spruce bud worm, spruce and fir, but it's because of their habitat, because of their limited ability to move around. Most other, all other birds and mammals that we have, if you get an epidemic or catastrophe or a forest fire or something, they can move over into adjoining territory and survive, but tree squeaks can't.

Interviewer: Mr. Dudley, thanks very much.

Jack Dudley: You are entirely welcome.

Interviewer: Bye, bye.

Jack Dudley: If you're ever up in St. Stephen or in this area, why you can come out and see this one.

Interviewer: Ok, I'll do that. Thank you.

Jack Dudley: You're welcome.

Interviewer: Good bye.

Jack Dudley: Good bye.;

Interviewer: That was Jack Dudley of Pokomoonshine Lake in Maine.