



## State Animals of India

### Puducherry - Squirrel



**The Indian Palm Squirrel** also known as **Three-Striped palm squirrel** (*Funambulus palmarum*) was announced as the state animal of the Union territory of **Puducherry** of 16<sup>th</sup> April 2007. Every state and Union territory of India has its own State animal which represents the state and its policies. The Squirrel is upheld as the State animal because of its sacred significance in Hindu mythology.

Squirrels live in the canopy of trees and are pollinators of several tree species which have abundance of flower nectar. They play an important role as seed-dispersal agents in the forest eco system. There are 4 sub species of Indian palm squirrel that are native to India and Sri Lanka. Indian palm Squirrel inhabits tropical rainforests, savannas and Jungles.



### Squirrel in Indian Mythology

The legend associated with the Indian palm Squirrel is that it helped lord Rama to construct the Rama Setu bridge with Vanar Sena to help Rama cross the river and rescue Sita. Rama was very touched with the dedication and love from the little creature and in acknowledgement caresses the Squirrel's back, the legend thus also explains the stripes on the squirrel and their name- 'Three Striped' palm squirrel, stripes signifying marks of Rama's fingers.



## Squirrels Diet

Indian palm squirrel is an omnivore. Its diet is based on the fruit and nuts generally but it also consumes eggs, small birds, larvae and insects.

However, Squirrels can be trained easily to accept food from humans. Squirrels collect their own food and are very protective about it.

## Did You Know?

**The Indian Palm Species does not hibernate like other species of Squirrels.**

**Following species of squirrels are also found in the Union Territory of Puducherry:**



**Grey Squirrel**



**Red Squirrel**



**Northern flying Squirrel**

## Characteristics of The Indian Palm Squirrels

- It grows to the size of 6 to 7.8 inches and 3.5 to 4.2 ounces of weight.
- It produces shrill “chip chip” sound when it detects predators being solitary creature.
- The mating season takes place all round the year.
- They can survive 2 to 4 years in the wild and 5.5 in captivity.

## Threat

- 1) Squirrel hair is used to make up brushes causing suffering to the animal.
- 2) They are also used to test cosmetics at times.
- 3) Growing urbanization leads to loss of habitat.



## Conservation Status

Under International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red list the Indian palm squirrel comes under the Least Concerned species (LC) as they do not qualify threatened, near threatened or conservation dependent status.

Due to lack of natural enemies they are found in good numbers, only cats, prey birds and snake feed on them. They reach sexual maturity at the age of 9 months and a female squirrel produces 3-5 litters each year. Their good number is also a result of their adaptable nature.

However, the Giant Squirrel (*Ratufa macroura*) is protected under Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. In India *Ratufa* are considered an ancient species, as they are similar to the earliest known fossils of squirrels from the Oligocene, 35 million years back.

## Activities

A) Visit a park near your house and observe, if you spot any squirrel write a short story with the title 'My encounter with the Squirrel'.

B) Match the following:

Squirrel  
Mouse  
Monkey  
Elephant

Banana  
Sugar cane  
ground nut  
cheese



C) Complete me!

D) Mention any 4 places in your city where you can find squirrels.

## Sources

Book:

Bharucha, Erach, Wonders of Indian Wilderness Vol1, The Nature of Biodiversity in India, Reliance Pvt. Ltd in association with Mapin publishing, 2006.

Online:

[www.conservationindia.org](http://www.conservationindia.org)  
[www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)  
[www.a-animals.com](http://www.a-animals.com)  
[www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com)  
[www.peta.org](http://www.peta.org)