



Dances with Squirrels

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Occasionally, amidst all of the things that have to get done with too little time to do them, I find myself seeking refuge in an island in our backyard. About 25 feet in diameter, our "island" is comprised of tall trees, some cultivated flowers, a hammock and a single bird feeder. On those clear days with a gentle summer breeze, it is truly a wonderful place to simply relax.

The bird feeder is about 10 feet away from the hammock, and like most bird feeders, sees its share of squirrels. Donna and I long ago gave up trying to keep the small mammals off the feeders, and have come to accept the fact that there's no outwitting them. Even Shadow, our black German Shepard and Master of the Backyard Dominion, doesn't bother chasing them any more. But that doesn't keep Donna and me from chasing them off the feeders when the opportunity presents itself. After all, we bought these devices as *bird* feeders, not squirrel feeders.

One beautiful Saturday, I once again found myself in the island, in the hammock, enjoying an afternoon siesta. I was awakened by the sound of a squirrel raiding the feeder, hanging upside by its hind feet as it enjoyed a sunflower seed treat. Figuring it may be fun to harass the little fellow, I simply raised my arm from the hammock. With the movement, the squirrel leaped off the feeder, which is about 6 feet off the ground, and scampered up a tree. About 5 minutes later, after lying motionless but keeping an eye on him, the squirrel returned and resumed his feeding. Once again, I made a small movement and off he went. We continued this over and over for the better part of an hour, until the little raider gave up.

With a smirk on my face, I figured I showed him who the boss is. No squirrel is going to raid *this* bird feeder while I'm *right here* in this hammock!

The next day, the gorgeous weather held on Long Island and once again, I could not resist another afternoon siesta in the hammock. I fell asleep to the calls of chickadees, titmouse, cardinals, blue jays and mourning doves. The squirrels seemed preoccupied with a feeder in another part of our yard. Half asleep, I looked off to my left and saw my furry friend from the previous day traversing the freshly-cut lawn approaching the island. I remained absolutely motionless as the squirrel came to within a few feet of the hammock. With my head turned to the side and my eyes open just enough to see, I kept an eye the intrepid bird feeder raider, waiting to see what his next move would be. What I soon realized was that he was doing the same with me!

For the longest time, the squirrel just sat on the ground and we remained locked in a mortal-combat stare-down. He then jumped up on a tree about 3 feet from the side of the hammock and stopped at eye level with me, maintaining his arm's-length-away observation of his tormentor. The stare-down continued for a while longer, until he climbed further up the tree.

A few minutes later, he had made his way to the branch from which the bird feeder is hung by a short piece of wire. He positioned himself right above the feeder and resumed his stare-down. His demeanor was one of determination and persistence. Finally, he slid down the wire, hung himself in usual fashion on the *opposite side* of the feeder where I could not see him or him me, and proceeded to enjoy another sunflower seed feast.

"You know, there's a reason they're called bird feeders" was my out-loud, matter-of-fact comment after realizing that my arm flailing was no longer having any affect. The squirrel peeked at me from around the side of the feeder, sunflower seed in front paws, but offered no rebuttal.

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