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The Cover

Early morning in the North American coniferous forest finds vigorous activity among all who live there. Scampering, fluttering or crawling to secure food, tree and ground dwellers appear unaware of inevitable abrupt ends. Livelihood seems simply a business that extends from one day to the next.

One of these creatures, the red squirrel (cover), has a highly specialized business of collecting and storing pine cones, fruits, and nuts. Hiding his harvest in tree nooks, under ground, rocks, or branch heaps, the squirrel assures his winter food supply as well as new plant generations. On certain days, the forest resounds with thump after thump of squirrel-cut pine cones that fall to the forest floor. The bush-tailed rodent then scampers with characteristic agility down-tree to the cones, where he artfully removes the scales from base to tip, and devours the seeds within the cone. He also enjoys a diet of berries, fruits, nuts, and, like other rodents, meat when he can get it. The red squirrel is either tolerant of or immune to mushroom poison, and also eats a good deal of fungi.

Strong sense of ownership and property instinct are reflected in squirrel behavior. Boisterous chattering is one of the red squirrel's most notable and amusing characteristics; poachers and raiders who dare to threaten his hidden treasures are scolded with a rush of squirrel words.

People scolded by the red squirrel are wise to take heed, for the squirrel's bark is better received than his bite, which can leave one with rabies.

Rabies vaccine for preexposure has limitations in effectiveness. Experimental vaccines are discussed on page 1131.

—JEANETTE ALMADA

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