



Woods Reader

- The Rope Swing
- Heritage apples
- Oak barrels
- *Challenge winners!*

\$7.95

Vol. 2, Issue 2
Summer 2019

ISSN 2641-5038

Oh, Nutz!!!

by Michele Sprague
artwork by Lawrence Sulkowski

I opened the curtains and came face-to-face with a red-tail squirrel, whom we named Chatter. His flat body pressed against the window screen; his arms and legs outstretched. Chatter looked like an animal version of Spider-Man.

With only the glass separating us, we stared at each other for a few seconds. Then he dashed away.

When we moved into our condo, one of the features that attracted us was the grassy area behind our condo. Behind the brick wall that separated our garden area from the grassy area were two magnificent black walnut trees. Evergreen and deciduous trees were sporadically planted along the property's border that separated the condos from a neighborhood. And there were a few small wooded areas along the walking paths. This area was

home for many squirrels and visitors that included a couple of predator hawks.

Chatter habitually positioned himself like a gargoyle on our neighbor's rod iron gate or on top of the brick pillar that was a few feet from the walnut trees. He also spent a lot of time on what we called the runway – the top of the redwood fence that butted up against the building's wall and stretched out to the brick pillar.

My husband and I – retirees and married two years – found Chatter a source of entertainment. We were amazed at his agility and precision as he leaped from one tree to another. Chatter chased squirrels that were twice his size. Once a gray squirrel sauntered onto the brick wall – an area that Chatter considered his territory. Chatter leaped on the gray squirrel's back, and



they hurled over the brick wall.

And there were the frequent hunting expeditions by a couple of hawks. One day a hawk sat on a low branch of a black walnut tree that was a few feet away from the brick pillar. Fearing Chatter's life, I yelled at the hawk to scare it away. The hawk sat defiantly on a branch that may have been four feet off the ground. I ran towards him, yelling and got closer than I thought he would allow. Then he flew away. It didn't take long for Chatter to resume his place on the brick pillar.

Red tail squirrels measure approximately 12 inches from nose to tail tip, and weigh approximately 8.4 ounces. Contrary to

public belief about squirrels, Chatter didn't always bury his nuts. He stockpiled over 100 green, unripe black walnuts underneath my neighbor's picnic table. We found the growing pile of nuts amusing, which my neighbors didn't disturb. On the other hand, Chatter also buried nuts in their flower pots and lawn.

This squirrel entertained us daily as we watched him leap and carry nuts back and forth – even shelling them for dinner. The “us” included my neighbors and their cats. The cats were mostly annoyed.

My husband placed a yellow, toy dump truck and a sign near Chatter's growing nut

The sign said,
**Opening soon
Nut-a-licious Café**

Ways to use Woods Reader....

getting inspired...enjoying great photography...saying 'thanks'...meeting new authors...enhancing a tabletop...laughing a little...wishing 'happy birthday'...daydreaming about the woods...finding answers...taking a challenge... 'so that's why!'...ideas for the next trip...a good short read... gift for someone you don't know well, or know very well, or who has everything else they need, or doesn't have much space, or likes to read, or likes trees and nature, or just to say, 'thanks for being in my life.'

Send a gift today at woodsreader.com

collection. The sign said “Opening soon, Nut-a-licious Café.

Things took an interesting turn in February. Chatter barked sporadically throughout the day. We learned mating season for red-tail squirrels takes place in March to May, and wondered if Chatter was looking for a mate.

The next day, Chatter leaped from the fence railing to the pillar, stopped and looked around and repeated that behavior throughout the morning. Then two red-tail squirrels arrived.

The squirrels chased each other at top speed – up and down the fence, through the yard, under a gate, down the sidewalk...and again and again. Occasionally, they stopped to catch their breath – one took refuge under a shrub; one on the porch; and one stood shaking on the fence. After a few minutes rest, the high-speed chase began again.

Suddenly, everything stopped. The squirrels took refuge in shrubs as a hawk flew overhead. A few minutes later, the games resumed. Eventually, the animals went their separate ways.

A month later, a female, red-tailed squirrel appeared in Chatter’s domain. We named her Chloe. For hours, the squirrels sat still on opposite fence railings. The standoff ended when Chatter surrendered his domain to Chloë. Because everything went so peacefully, Larry said, “Chloe must be his daughter.”

We still wonder about Chatter. Larry and I find ourselves glancing out the window hoping to see him on the runway. But we haven’t seen him. Chatter taught us a lot about the life and times of squirrels – no doubt into the animal world of survival. We have a deeper understanding of animals and their struggle to survive. ✧

