

Short-tailed Shrew, *Blarina brevicauda*, Apparently Killed by Red Squirrel, *Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*

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On 2 November 2003, a freshly killed Short-tailed Shrew found beneath a bird feeder was likely the victim of an aggressive locally-resident Red Squirrel. The minimal amount of snow cover at the time is hypothesized to have prevented an escape such as had been observed in an encounter between these species in a previous year.

Key Words: Short-tailed Shrew, *Blarina brevicauda*, Red Squirrel, *Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*, aggression, Manitoba.

In mid-afternoon on 2 November 2003, I found a freshly-killed Short-tailed Shrew, *Blarina brevicauda*, lying on the seed-strewn ground beneath one of our bird feeders which is fastened to the trunk of a large oak tree. I could hardly have failed to notice the shrew had it been there earlier as the site is readily visible from our living-room windows. The shrew was lying on bare grass which two days earlier I had shovelled clear of a thin layer of new snow. Up to this time, I had not noticed any shrew sign. The dead shrew, a surprisingly thin female, had fresh bloody bite marks on the back of its neck, on one shoulder, and on the side of its head.

As I could think of no other explanation, I presumed that the shrew, which was possibly attracted by the bird seed, had been attacked and killed not long before I returned home from a short outing, as it was still bleeding. I guessed that the killer was one of our two resident Red Squirrels. One, in particular, an aggressive creature that established residence here in the previous spring, claimed this oak tree as one of its primary sites,

regularly driving away other Red Squirrels and Grey Squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*); it also frequently harassed birds of nearly all species. Nevertheless, partly because we have two other nearby bird-feeding sites, songbirds do regularly visit here.

Previous observations of a Red Squirrel (not this particular one) showing similar belligerence have been of some interest. In this same general area, Nero (1996) noted that in early December 1995 a Red Squirrel was observed attacking a Short-tailed Shrew. That shrew struggled fiercely and then escaped its attacker by diving into a burrow in the snow. In the 2003 incident, owing to the minimal amount of snow in the vicinity, the shrew had no escape route.

Literature Cited

Nero, R. W. 1996. Red Squirrel, *Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*, Short-tailed Shrew, *Blarina brevicauda*, brief interaction. Canadian Field-Naturalist 110: 712.

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