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When you see the Eastern Fox Squirrel, you see a pioneer.

The American Dream: a basis of happiness and fortitude for our nation. What about those species and individuals who do not fit into this dream? We are forgotten about by corporations and companies who value wealth over the life of not only humans but every other species on this earth. The Eastern Fox Squirrel, also known as *Sciurus Niger*, is one of these species whose lives have been ignored over the blanket of the American Dream. This species most commonly inhabits the east coast of the United States ranging from New England to Florida. They got their name from the red belly color that resembles a fox. In their basic habitat, the squirrels build open nests on the trunks of trees in savannah-like habitats with little human traffic. Adult fox squirrels are omnivores, however they favor available acorns and seeds to munch on (Moore 24 & 49). With these habitat and feeding characteristics, the common human action of chopping down trees actively displaces this species. Throughout the past two decades, the theme of manifest destiny has led to the destruction of this specie's habitat through westward expansion and destruction of trees. This species is repeatedly having to fight for its life amidst facing threatening and preventable human behaviors. *Sciurus Niger* is fighting against warming climates by fostering tree growth in an attempt to save not only its species but everyone who cohabits their world.

As the Western World continues to expand, so does the need for residential and commercial buildings to consume the land, therefore the US has seen mass amounts of deforestation efforts to allow for more human life. The roots of deforestation span far back into the 19th century when British colonizers took control of the land now known as America. At the

time, cotton was a delicacy and plantation owners would remove any and all trees from their land to create space to grow cotton (Varanasi). This theme of destroying the environment for the sake of economic benefit has been following humans since the time of US colonization. Trees play a crucial role in maintaining the amount of carbon dioxide in the air because of the fact that they are the biggest photosynthetic organism and consequently consume the most carbon dioxide. The reason that plant species are so valuable in this ability to consume atmospheric carbon is due to the fact that human activity, from driving a gas-fueled car to running mega fossil fuel corporations, emits massive amounts of carbon dioxide into the air. However as the sheer amount of trees has decreased and the rates of carbon emissions rise, our world continues to spiral into extreme climate patterns. We will come to see that some of the most inconspicuous animals, such as the Eastern Fox Squirrel, will use their nature to attempt to reverse the acts of human colonialism.

Sciurus Niger is a key organism in the spreading and harvesting of tree seeds, making their behavior crucial to reversing deforestation present today. The trees that the squirrels live in, such as oak and hickory, tend to have large seeds which do not easily scatter in the wind, making squirrels crucial to their lifespan. Without the physical scattering of seeds, these trees' seeds would dry up and degrade on the forest floor (Hetzler). Now that the injustices against this species and the importance of this squirrel has been established, how do we bring justice to this species? It starts on the individual and communal level by preventing the destruction of trees around us . It can also be applied on a larger scale to boycott companies that use deforestation as a means to acquire profit. Walmart, for example, is one of the many large corporations that had zero-deforestation goals set for the year 2020, however they did not set specific measures to reach said goal. And when asked about this clear gap in logic, they responded that deforestation

was “not an immediate business priority” (Lai). Every single day humans are consuming these brands that have no value or concern for our earth and the species that inhabit it. Protecting trees and forests not only will allow for less carbon to be present in the atmosphere, but will give key species such as the Eastern Fox Squirrel a home where they can promote the wellbeing of the trees and forests.

The symbiotic relationship between the Eastern Fox Squirrel and the trees they inhabit is being destroyed by human action. Dating back to the 1600’s, when the British colonized the present day United States, the removal of trees and forests became a common step in creating plantation land. This act of deforestation has remained present throughout the years to increase space for commercial and residential land. Yet, the Eastern Fox Squirrel works hard behind the scenes to recreate their home and by proxy aids in a world working to decrease carbon levels in the air. I see my brother a lot in these small, fierce creatures. Reed, my 21 year-old brother, has been battling a rare neurodegenerative disease for the past 3 years. As his own genetics are actively destroying his cells, each and every day he fights back to rebuild his strength. His specific symptoms are aggravated by increased temperatures, which is not helped by global warming. His body is his home, and though it is actively being destroyed, he works relentlessly behind the scenes to rebuild his home. Though this situation is not directly related to climate change, the grittiness, perseverance, and passion displayed in species who actively face displacement is vastly admirable. To rebuild the once valued basis of happiness and fortitude in our nation, we must move attention from large corporations to advocate for any and all species who face death, illness, or trauma as a result of climate change.

Works Cited

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