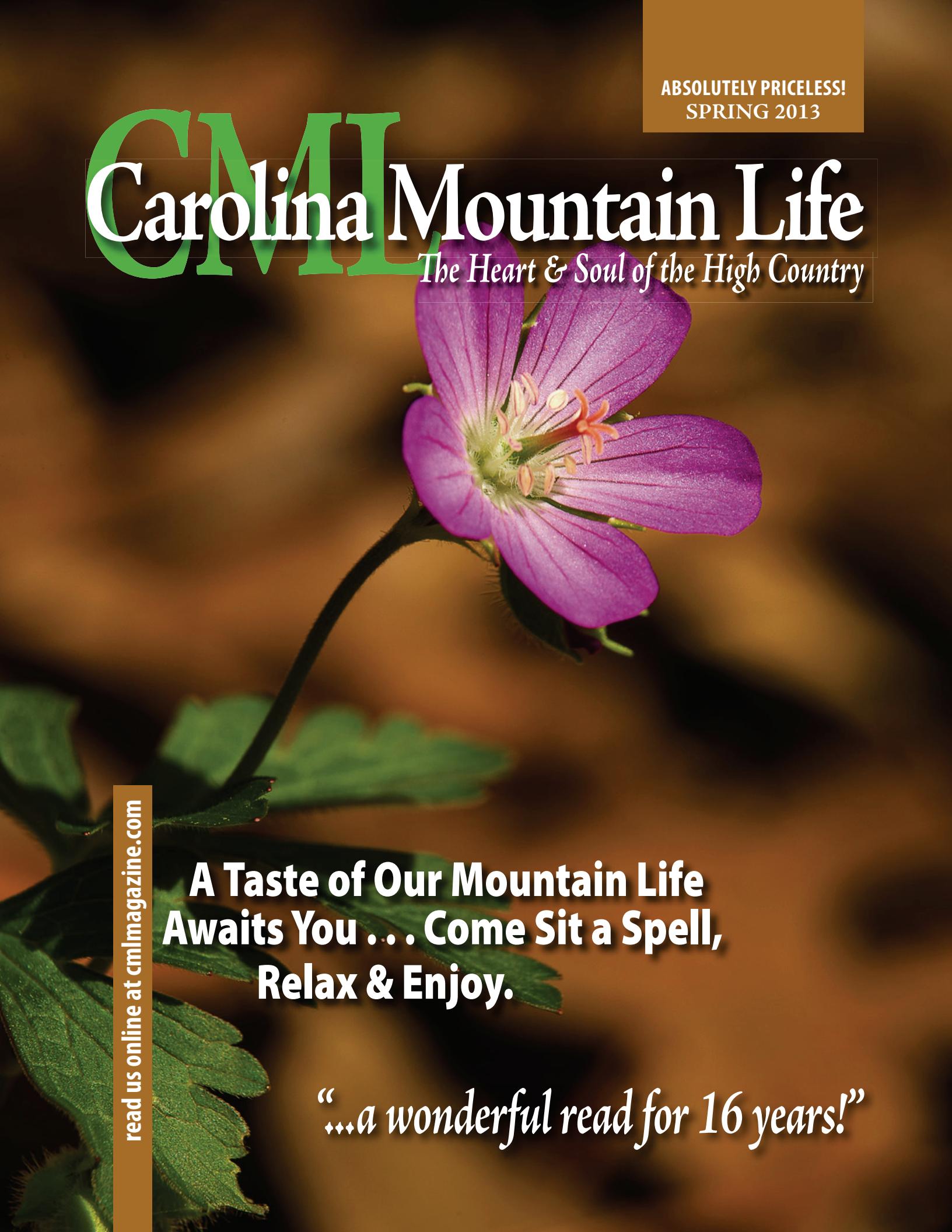


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A cautionary tale and a fuzzy one at that! One Grey Squirrel... One Season Long Battle

By Michael J. Solender

Why is it with such big brains, we humans get routinely trumped and out maneuvered by fuzzy-tailed squirrels whose brain is no bigger than a walnut?

Like many *Carolina Mountain Life* readers I enjoy the pleasures of backyard birding. The emphasis in the previous sentence should be on BACKYARD, preferably with a Mimosa or Gin and Tonic (depending on the time of day) in firm grip. No out of the way woodsy affairs for me, ticks in my book are for grandfather clocks and I don't know of any backyard birder who ever turned their ankle under the rough terrain of newly laid concrete pavers.

An unwanted four legged guest arrived this spring just as I put out my new feeder – allegedly squirrel proof – and proceeded in a daily ritual of cleaning me, and whatever birds I'd happen to coax into the yard, out of feed thereby denying me the pleasure of their company. That the nervy little bugger took such pleasure in defeating the very design of a feeder manufactured to keep him out was merely insult to injury.

I must embarrassingly report that in a season long battle to extradite him from the free buffet, I've been outsmarted every step of the way.

I don't know about your place, but the birds at my Shangri-La prefer seed over libations and the main lure to my back 40 is and always will be sunflower seed, the black oil variety. Now it turns out that this is precisely the very food that most certainly tops the list of my buck toothed grey intruder. And while I'm only too happy to keep my feathered friends up to their little gizzards in sunflower seed, I draw the line with avian

wildlife preferring NOT to feed wily grey squirrels who scoff at my repeated attempts to foil them.

While we are all God's creatures, the little monster in my backyard is not your average rat with a bushy tail. Clearly this one has advanced education, likely possessing graduate degrees in engineering and physics as well as undoubtedly receiving aerial and gymnastic training from Cirque du Soleil.

Regardless of the squirrel "resistant" (second look at the boxes indicate none of them claim "squirrel proof") feeders I've employed, this fur covered rodent and his pals chatter in sheer delight with each and every attempt I've made to shut them down.

I'm convinced they have "plants" on the payroll at various manufacturers. You've seen the ads these companies run in the outdoorsy catalogues promising not only protection but hilarity and watching the futile attempts of squirrels trying to penetrate their fortified vertical feeding troughs. Their inside knowledge at the inner workings of these devices is just a bit too good.

I've tried the "cage" of course. You know this one. The giant plastic tube surrounded by an aluminum cage that is big enough for small birds but too small for our backyard pal. My squirrel loves this one, using it as his own personal carnival ride. He jumps on it from an adjacent tree and then begins to swing it violently all the while it spreads seed along the ground from which he and his pals then belly up to.

While the green, house-like feeders with the back-weighted perches that close down on the feeding troughs are great for crows, they truly are bird-brained and can't outsmart this design,

though it is no challenge for my guy.

Regardless of its sloped roof, my nimble acrobat demonstrates remarkable dexterity as he hangs upside down from the roof with his greedy little head in amongst the seed. The triangular cone that is supposed to keep them off the Sheppard's hook? I began using this setup placing it far away from trees that served as launching pads for the offending critters only to determine the only prime viewing spots were too close to the house, keeping the birds away too.

\$300 into to my battle and they were clearly winning. My squirrel was there on my brick fencing daily, surveying the landscape. He mocked me, giving high fives to his pals as I just sat with my G & Ts steaming.

Finally it was my local garden store that proved to be my salvation. At just north of \$100 (or 10 bags worth of seed) a special feeder with a long plastic barrel and spring-loaded break-away perches seemed like the answer to my prayers. It is too tall for the squirrel to hang upside down from the top to feed. The tiny perches fell off when anything heavy like a squirrel tried to grasp them. The tiny feeder holes above the perches also discouraged the bigger headed (and much bigger brained) squirrel also seemed to be just the ticket.

\$500 and the entire season later, I am declaring victory. But you know what?

After all that battling, I kind of miss the fight.

Michael J. Solender is a Charlotte based freelance writer. You can read more of his work at: michaeljwritess.com Reach him with story ideas at: michaeljsolender@gmail.com.