

# The Adventures of Pixel, the Stowaway

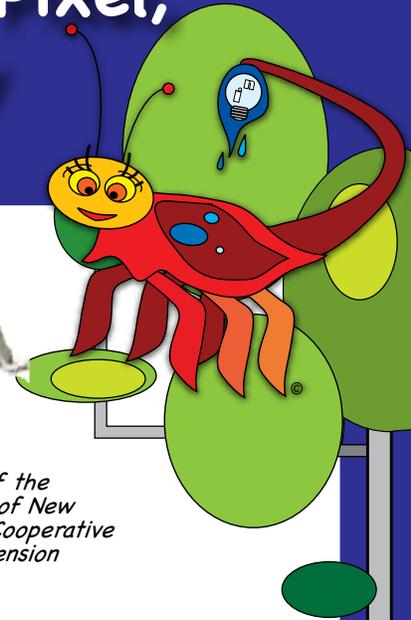


## Fairydiddles

"Hi! Pixel, the Stowaway, here. I really had to scramble this morning to get into my Kid-Bit friend Al's camera. He was in a hurry to unplug the camera from the computer and get outside to see a flying fairydiddle. I didn't want to miss that either, whatever it was!



*Courtesy of the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension*



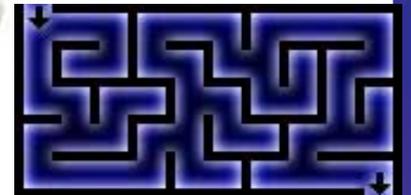
I think Al is a fairydiddle expert! He taught me lots of interesting facts about them.



*Courtesy of Al Giraldi*

First, he said that fairydiddles are flying squirrels. Wow! Squirrels can fly? Well, not really he said, but flying squirrels are champion gliders. Al told me they have a special flap of skin, called the patagium that stretches from their front legs to their back legs. This flap gives them a really big area to act like the surface of a wing, and the furry tail spreads out flat for additional surface area. The tail is not a rudder for steering. Flying squirrels steer by swooping and banking, just like a paper airplane. When they get to their tree, they use their momentum to scoot around the trunk to the opposite side. This disappearing act is an anti-owl maneuver because owls use their great eyesight to hunt flying squirrels in the dark forest.

Flying squirrels have extremely long whiskers which they point forward as they glide. The whiskers act as an early warning system in the dark. If the whiskers touch a surface, it tells the squirrel it is about to crash-land! Flying squirrels are so quick that they can adjust their bodies and land more or less OK most of the time.



Flying squirrels are very noisy -- they chatter constantly, even in the air. Their voices are so high-pitched that adult humans can't hear them. Scientists once thought that the squirrel chatter served as a form of echo-location, just like in bats. As an experiment, the scientists set up a maze and let flying squirrels glide around it in low light. With their big eyes that are adapted to dim light, the fairydiddles had no problems navigating the maze to a peanut butter reward. But, when the lights were off, and the maze was in complete darkness, the squirrels kept crashing into the walls. The scientists decided that flying squirrels don't echo-locate, but they ARE very chatty. Al says I'm like that too.

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I also learned that Australia has sugar gliders. They look a lot like flying squirrels, but they are marsupials, related to kangaroos and koalas, and have pouches for their babies to sit in. Isn't nature strange and wonderful?

*Sugar Glider & Moon  
Courtesy of OMG, What Is That??? The Blog.*

Al said there are plenty of other animals that can fly, although you wouldn't think they could. Flying fish have long fins that open up to a wing-like surface when they jump out of the water to escape fast predators like tuna and dolphin fish. Rain forests around the world have several different kinds of flying frogs. Flying lizards can spread out their ribs to make a gliding surface and swoop from tree to tree. There are even flying snakes that also spread their rib cages out to almost flat and wiggle as they glide.



*Flying Fish  
Courtesy of Wikipedia*



*Wallace's Flying Frog  
(Rhacophorus nigropalmatus)  
Illustration from The Malay Archipelago.  
Courtesy of Wikipedia*



*Flying Lizard  
Courtesy of Wikipedia*

Al says that in the original Italian Cinderella story, beautiful Cinderella wore slippers made from squirrel fur. When the story was translated from Italian into French, the Italian word for 'fur' sounded like the French word for 'glass,' and Cinderella has worn glass slippers ever since. Flying squirrel fur is really soft, so I think it would be way more comfortable to dance in fur slippers than glass ones.

Though... I think the squirrel would rather keep his fur to himself!"



*Glass Slipper  
Courtesy of halloweenmanor.com*

If you could redesign your body,  
what would your body look like?