

Squirrel Emoji Submission

To: Unicode Consortium

15 November 2017

Author: Andrew West


Abstract

This proposal requests the addition of a SQUIRREL emoji to the Unicode Emoji Standard. The proposed emoji character typically represents either a Red Squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*) or a Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*). Squirrels are a distinctive family of rodents that have a global distribution, and are widely represented in art and literature. For compatibility reasons squirrel should not be unified with the existing chipmunk character at U+1F43F.

Background

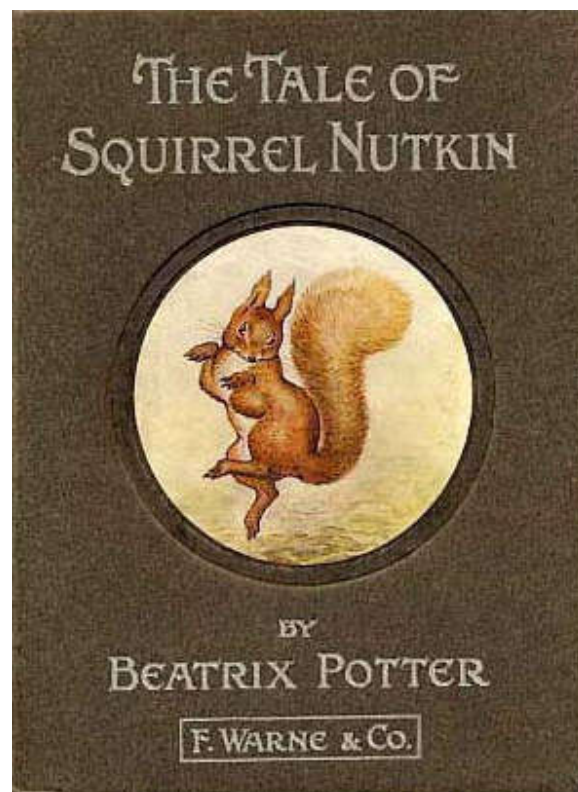
As part of ballot comments on ISO/IEC 10646 5th edition PDAM 1.3, the UK national body made a request to SC2 to encode pictographic characters representing Badger, Swan and Squirrel in order to help fill a gap in the representation of iconic British wildlife in the Universal Coded Character Set (see WG2 [N4870](#) pages 21-22). The WG2 meeting in Hohhot, China in September 2017 unanimously recommended the acceptance of these three pictographic characters (see WG2 [N4874](#) Recommendation M66.11), and they are provisionally assigned to 1F9A1 and 1F9A2 respectively (see WG2 [N4904](#) “Additional repertoire for ISO/IEC 10646:2017 (5th ed.) Amendment 2.2”). The current document provides additional information on the squirrel, and why it should be considered for emoji representation.

Introduction

A Chipmunk character with emoji properties is already encoded at U+1F43F, and some people have suggested that chipmunk can be used to represent squirrel as well. However, we consider that it is not appropriate to unify squirrel and chipmunk because chipmunk was encoded in Unicode 7.0 for compatibility with the chipmunk glyph () at U+F0F2 in Microsoft’s Webdings font (see [L2/11-052R](#)). The Unicode Standard states that “Dingbats and optical character recognition characters are different from all other characters in the standard, in that they are encoded based primarily on their precise appearance” (*The Unicode Standard* v. 10.0 p. 780). Although this statement does not explicitly cover Wingdings and Webdings, the Unicode Standard does indicate that Wingdings and Webdings characters were encoded for the same compatibility reasons as for Dingbats: “Other symbols—many of which are also pictographic—are encoded for compatibility with Webdings and Wingdings sets, or various e-mail systems, and to address other interchange requirements” (*The Unicode Standard* v. 10.0 p. 780). This implies that the precise appearance of the Unicode characters is important for interchange requirements, and so U+1F43F should consistently represent a chipmunk, and never a squirrel.

Chipmunks are a predominantly North American group of rodents. The eastern Chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*) lives only in Eastern North America, and the 23 species of *Neotamias* live mostly in western North America, but only a single chipmunk species, the Siberian Chipmunk (*Eutamias sibiricus*), is found outside of North America. Due to their limited geographical distribution and because the chipmunk is not a globally well-known animal it is doubtful that Chipmunk would have been accepted for encoding as an emoji if proposed as an individual character.

On the other hand, species of squirrels are widely distributed across North America, South America, Europe, Asia and Africa, and so are familiar to most people in the world. There are also many examples of squirrels in literature for both children and adults, the most famous example being *The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin* by Beatrix Potter. The Wikipedia article on fictional rodents in literature lists sixteen named fictional squirrels but only two fictional chipmunks, indicating the relative cultural importance of squirrels and chipmunks.¹

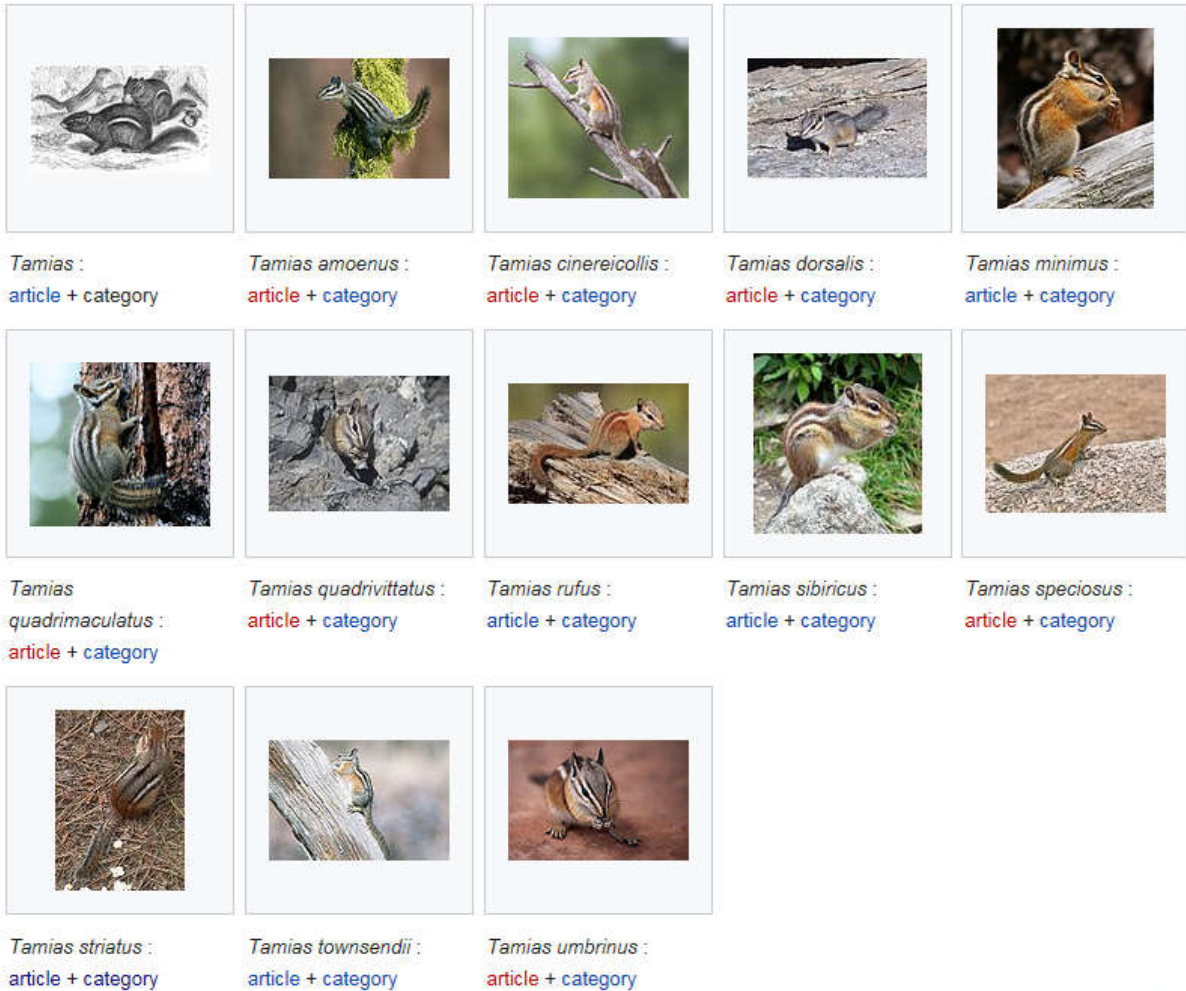


Tale of Squirrel Nutkin by Beatrix Potter

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_fictional_rodents_in_literature

Example images of various species of chipmunk from Wikimedia Commons are shown below.² Note that they all have a thin tail, and in not a single image is the tail held erect behind the back like a squirrel's tail.

Images of Various Species of Chipmunk on Wikimedia Commons



Compare the above images of chipmunks with the following example images of red squirrels and gray squirrels from Wikimedia Commons.³ These show that both red and gray squirrels have a bushy tail which is typically held erect behind their back.

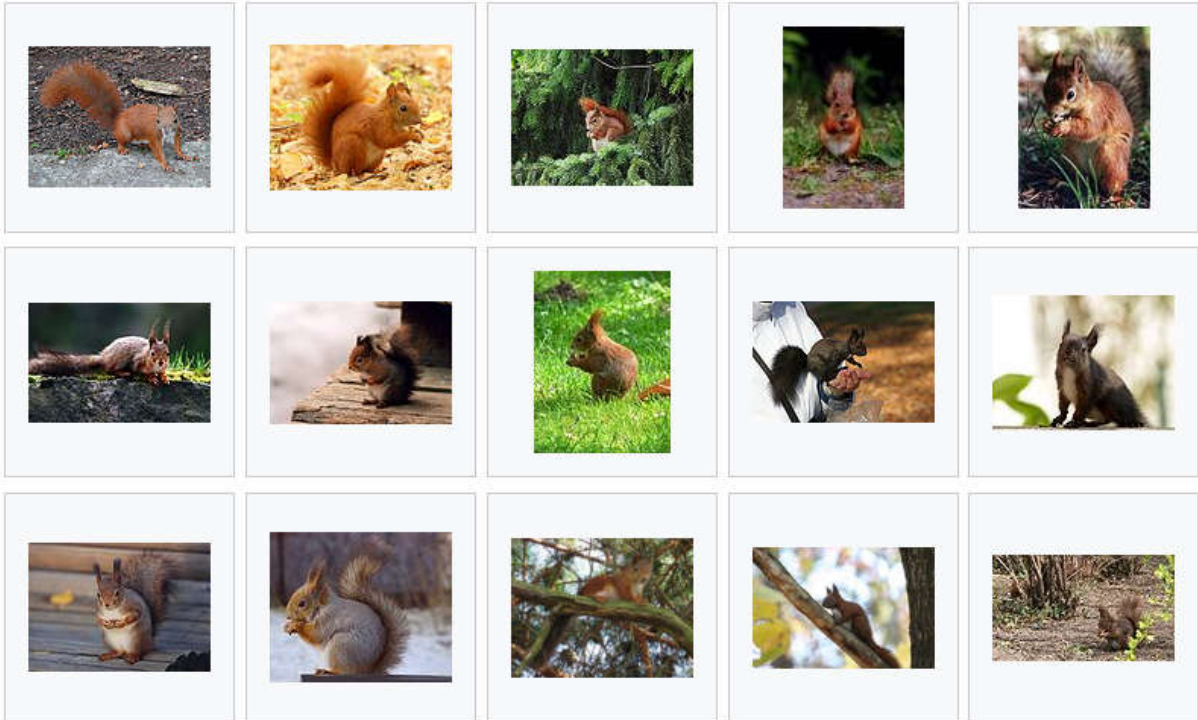
² <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Tamias>

³ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Sciurus_vulgaris and https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Sciurus_carolinensis

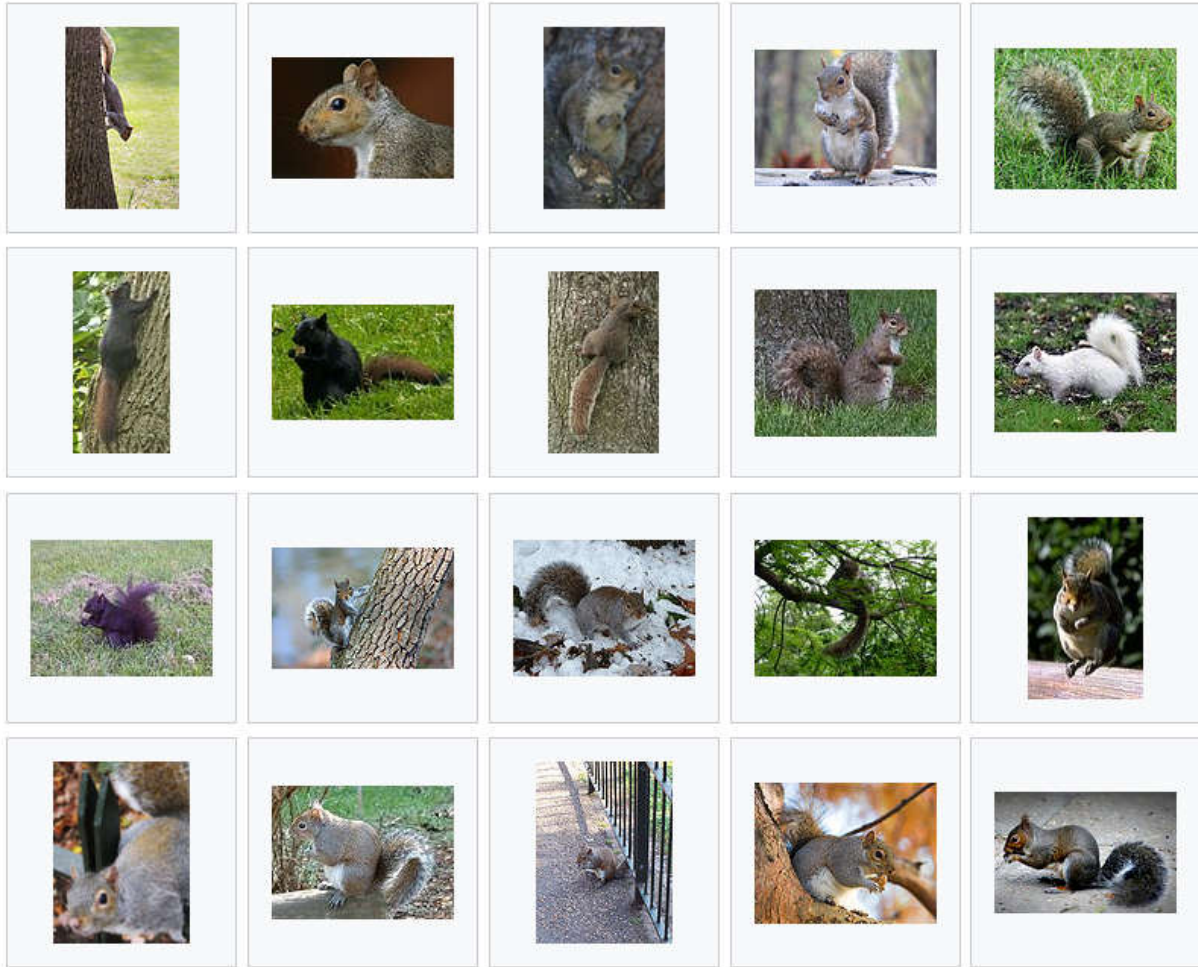
Images of Red Squirrel on Wikimedia Commons



[Łazienki Warszawskie](#)






Images of Gray Squirrel on Wikimedia Commons



The original Webdings glyph for the Chipmunk closely resembles the posture and tail position of real chipmunks, and could not be mistaken for a squirrel:













The glyph for U+1F43F CHIPMUNK in the Unicode code charts is modelled on the Webdings glyph, and is also clearly a chipmunk.

		
1F42F	1F43F	1F44F

There is a very clear difference between the Webdings/Unicode chipmunk glyphs and a typical image of a red or gray squirrel. The difference is comparable to the difference between a llama and a Dromedary or Bactrian Camel. Llamas and camels are both members of the same family Camelidae, and the main distinction between Llama, Dromedary, and Bactrian Camel is the number of humps, but the Llama emoji has been accepted for Unicode 11.0 even though we already have two camel emoji.

The problem with U+1F43F is that most vendors do not draw the chipmunk emoji like a real a chipmunk, but more like a squirrel with stripes. ⁴

Emoji Representations of U+1F43F by Different Vendors

Apple		WhatsApp	
Google		Facebook	
Microsoft		Twitter	
Samsung		EmojiOne	
LG		emojindex	

The upright posture and erect bushy tail shown in most vendor's emoji do not realistically depict a chipmunk, which causes confusion among users who may mistake the emoji for a squirrel emoji rather than a chipmunk emoji. Indeed some vendors may deliberately be trying to change the chipmunk into a squirrel as squirrels are far more well-known and beloved than chipmunks. The Google emoji in particular can only be a squirrel, and not a chipmunk, as it is not striped.

This representation of the Chipmunk emoji as a Squirrel or a fantasy Squirrel-Chipmunk hybrid is problematic because U+1F43F CHIPMUNK was encoded for compatibility with Webdings, and if the chipmunk emoji morphs into a squirrel over time, that compatibility will be lost, and data that includes transcoded Webdings glyphs may no longer represent what the original author intended.

⁴ <https://emojipedia.org/chipmunk/>

Our concern is that if in the future all or most vendors depict U+1F43F as a squirrel rather than as a chipmunk there will be pressure on the Unicode Technical Committee to change the representative glyph for U+1F43F in the Unicode code charts to show a squirrel rather than a chipmunk (cf. the recent change of the code chart glyph for U+1F3B1 BILLIARDS to show an “8-Ball”, reflecting vendor implementations). If this were to happen then U+1F43F would no longer reflect the original compatibility mapping to Webding’s chipmunk glyph, which was the **only** reason it was accepted for encoding in the first place.

Therefore, we believe that encoding a separate character for SQUIRREL is the best way to ensure that the compatibility between Unicode U+1F43F CHIPMUNK and Webdings U+F0F2 is maintained. If there is both a squirrel emoji and a chipmunk emoji then vendors will draw the chipmunk like a chipmunk, and the squirrel like a squirrel, and users will be less confused as to what animal U+1F43F represents.

1. Identification

A. CLDR short name: squirrel

B. CLDR keywords: mammal | squirrel

2. Sample images

A. Color image

ARTWORK PENDING

Source: TBD

License: Public domain

B. Black and white image

ARTWORK PENDING

Source: TBD

License: Public domain

3. Selection factors — Inclusion

A. Compatibility

A number of internet sites offer emoji stickers for squirrels, as shown below:

- Skype emoticons include Heidi the Squirrel (<http://www.skaip.org/heidy-emoticon>)
- Symbols & Emoticons stickers for Facebook include a Fluffy Squirrel emoji sticker (<http://www.symbols-n-emoticons.com/2014/07/fluffy-squirrel.html>):

Heidy the Squirrel



Fluffy Squirrel



A squirrel emoji as an encoded character is therefore required for compatibility with such usage.

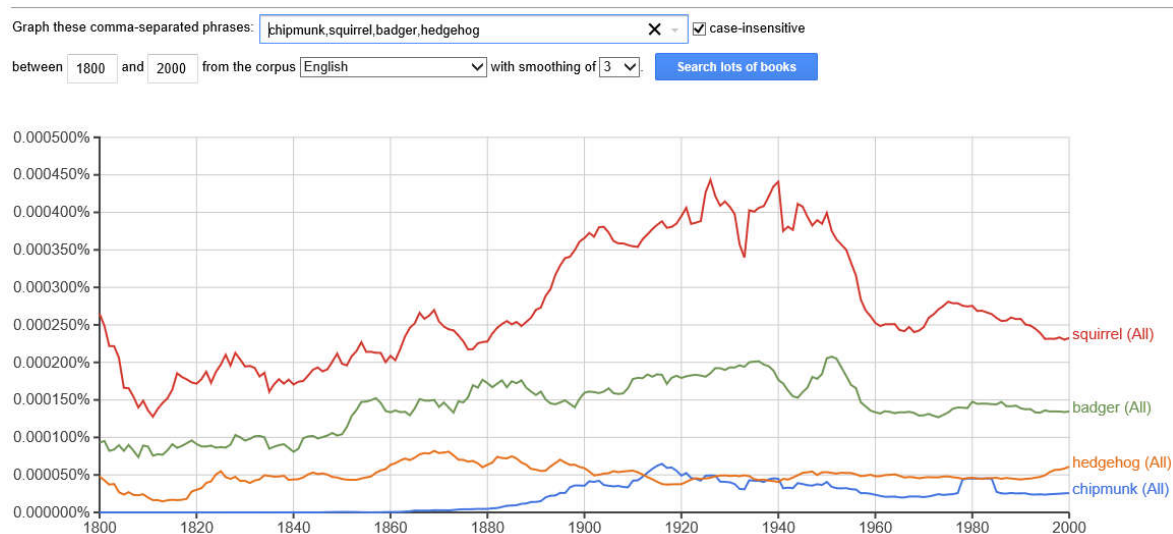
B. Expected usage level

1) Frequency

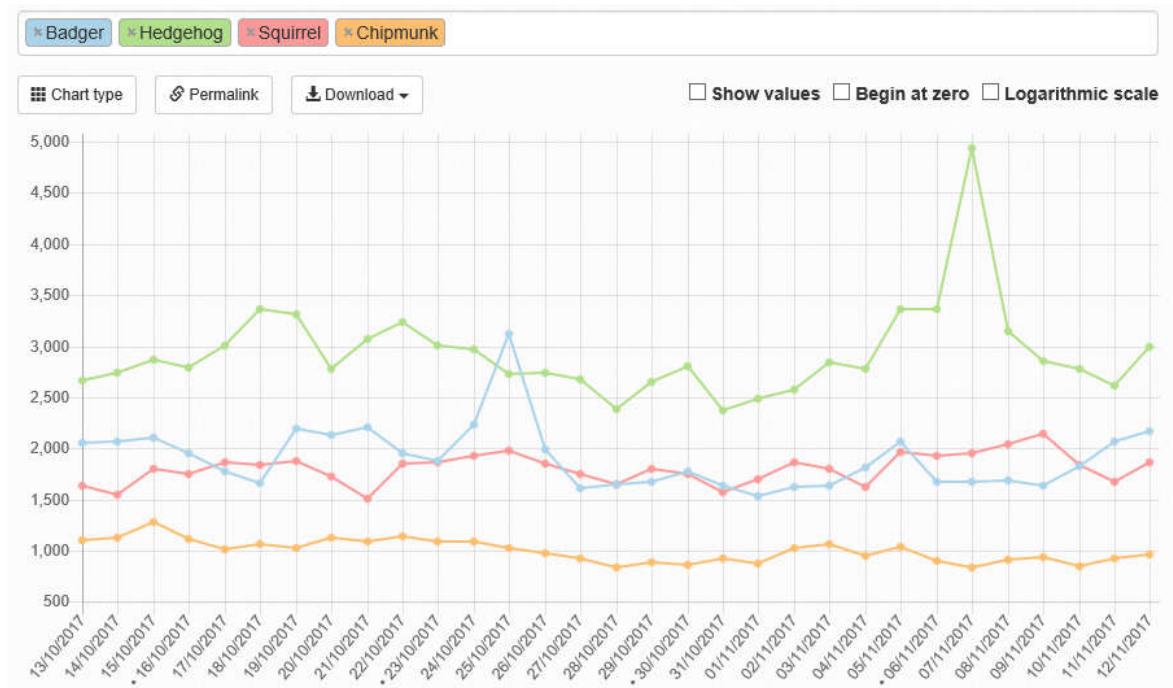
Google Trends shows that of the four animals, Chipmunk, Squirrel, Badger and Hedgehog, it is Squirrel that generated the greatest search interest over the past year, and Chipmunk which shows the least interest.



The following Google Ngram chart shows the occurrences of the words “chipmunk”, “squirrel”, “badger”, and “hedgehog” in printed books over the last 200 years. Squirrel has by far the highest frequency of occurrence, followed by Badger, whereas Chipmunk has the lowest frequency of occurrence.



Another indicator of the relative popularity of these four animals are their Wikipedia page view statistics, which show Hedgehog as the most viewed article, with Badger and Squirrel about equal second, and the Chipmunk article the least viewed:



Instagram hashtag statistics also confirm the squirrel as the most photographed of these four animals (badger performs poorly because it is nocturnal and so not commonly photographed):

#squirrel	2,610,514 posts	#hedgehog	2,082,991 posts
#chipmunk	417,130 posts	#badger	188,923 posts

2) Multiple usages

The squirrel is used as a metaphor for hoarding or hiding away of food or objects. Emoji users may well wish to use the squirrel emoji to indicate their hoarding activities. Chipmunk does not have any metaphorical usages.

C. Image distinctiveness

The squirrel does look similar to a chipmunk, but the chipmunk has conspicuous stripes and a different shaped tail and ears which distinguish the two animals. Compare the two photos below, where the Red Squirrel's tail is bushy and erect, whereas the Eastern Chipmunk's tail is much thinner and lies on the ground. Compare also the rounded ears of the chipmunk with the tufted ears of the squirrel. The postures of these two animals are very different, and cannot be confused.

Red Squirrel



CC BY 2.0 Peter Trimming
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Squirrel_posing.jpg

Eastern Chipmunk



CC BY 2.0 Gilles Gonthier
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tamias_striatus2.jpg

If vendors were to draw the chipmunk emoji like a chipmunk (following the Webdings example), and the squirrel emoji like a squirrel (for example, like Heidi the Squirrel on Skype) then there would be no confusion between squirrel and chipmunk emoji. The only reason there may be confusion is because some vendors draw the chipmunk unrealistically like a squirrel with stripes. Adding a squirrel emoji will encourage vendors to draw the chipmunk more realistically, which will benefit users of the chipmunk emoji.

D. Completeness

The squirrel fills a gap in emoji for small garden mammals, and for tree-climbing rodents (chipmunks can climb trees but they mostly forage on the ground).

E. Frequently requested

A squirrel emoji is frequently requested on Twitter. A sample tweet bemoaning the lack of a squirrel emoji is shown below.



4. Selection factors — Exclusion

F. Overly specific

Not overly specific because the proposed emoji can represent all species of squirrel.

G. Open-ended

Not open-ended, as only one squirrel emoji is required.

H. Already representable

No. Chipmunk is similar to squirrel, but cannot satisfactorily represent it. This is clear from the many complaints of Twitter users.

I. Logos, brands, UI icons, signage, specific people, deities

Because the squirrel is such a popular animal it has been used as company and brand logos, but such usages are secondary.

J. Transient

No. The Squirrel has been a much loved animal for centuries.

K. Faulty comparison

No.

5. Sort location

A. Category: animal-mammal

B. Emoji it should come after in that category: Squirrel should come after rabbit.

6. Other information

None.