

## Property damage

Grey squirrels often cause problems by moving into the roof space of people's houses. Once inside, the squirrels will want to make a drey to live in, so they will import debris such as sticks and leaves from the outside. They will also utilise what is around them, tearing up insulation and chewing roof timbers and cables.



Damage to attics is probably the most expensive and potentially dangerous form of property damage caused by squirrels. The combination of damaged electrical cables and a mass of twigs, leaves and chewed timber is a serious fire hazard.

Pipes are also at risk from chewing causing properties to flood and water supplies can be contaminated by droppings in loft tanks.

Squirrels will also move into sheds and outbuildings causing similar problems.

## Control can be effective

Grey squirrel control is often considered as futile and a lost cause. Many landowners and organisations quote this as a reason for their inaction.

Controlling grey squirrels does take effort but with a methodical and consistent approach, squirrel populations can be reduced to much less damaging levels.

The most obvious sign of success is the lack of bark stripping on trees. Damage from previous years cannot be reversed but you can stop new damage from occurring.

In areas where red squirrels have recently been pushed out by the greys, there are examples where human intervention has seen the return of the red squirrel. Anglesey is a particular success story where grey squirrels have been removed entirely and the reds are thriving. Aberdeen has also seen the return of red squirrels after an absence of decades.

The benefits to other wildlife are harder to quantify but the removal of an alien competitor and predator, can only be beneficial to our native species.

Control does not have to be expensive. If you control squirrels yourself then of course this costs money, but there is an army of passionate volunteers out there looking for an opportunity to get involved.

For more information please contact:

[www.greysquirrelcontrol.co.uk](http://www.greysquirrelcontrol.co.uk)  
[www.fourteenacre.co.uk](http://www.fourteenacre.co.uk)  
[www.redsquirrels.info](http://www.redsquirrels.info)  
[www.britishredsquirrel.org](http://www.britishredsquirrel.org)  
[www.europeansquirrelinitiative.org](http://www.europeansquirrelinitiative.org)

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## Reasons to Control Grey Squirrels



This leaflet outlines the growing need to control grey squirrels in Great Britain. Detailed information on the legal methods of control can easily be found from the internet and books such as "The Grey Squirrel Management Handbook" by Charles Dutton.

With thanks to Red Squirrels Trust Wales, British Red Squirrel and European Squirrel Initiative.

## Red squirrels

Before grey squirrels arrived in Britain, the native red squirrel was widespread. Following the introduction of the grey squirrel in 1876, red squirrels rapidly disappeared from areas as they were colonised by the grey. Initially this was thought to be down to the grey squirrel simply outcompeting the red for food but later it was discovered that the grey is a carrier of the squirrelpox virus which is fatal to red squirrels.



The spread of the grey squirrel has seen the red squirrel all but wiped out in the south of England, with a few island colonies being the exception. In Wales there are a few pockets of red squirrels and Anglesey now has reds back again after successfully eradicating their greys.

The front line in the advance of the grey is the north of England and the borders. In these areas where the two species meet, there are many dedicated volunteers and professionals working to keep grey squirrels out of the red squirrel's remaining strongholds. This is a huge task involving many thousands of acres of land from coast to coast.

Controlling grey squirrels takes effort and one person can only cover a certain amount of land effectively. More volunteers are needed to help spread the workload. Another challenge is areas of land where no control is carried out. These act as reservoirs for the grey squirrel where they can breed and disperse.

## Bark stripping



Grey squirrels strip bark from trees to access the sap in the layer just underneath. Once damaged in this way, the flow of sap in the tree is interrupted and the part of the tree above the wound will often die. Even if this doesn't happen immediately, the wound is a weak

spot which may well give way in a spell of high winds. In more extreme cases, stripping can cause death of the entire tree.

Damaged trees do not grow into the handsome specimens we as humans enjoy seeing and for commercial growers they are worthless. Some of our favourite native species such as oak and beech are amongst those most often attacked. Today we admire magnificent mature examples of these, but the replacements which should be growing now will struggle to grow into trees of stature once they have sustained squirrel damage.

Over the past few decades the government has given out £millions in grants to plant trees, in particular native broadleaf species. Unless grey squirrels are controlled in these new plantings, they will reach around 12 years of age and then sustain very heavy squirrel damage. The time, effort and money will have been wasted. No wonder commercial growers would rather plant conifers.

## Effects on other wildlife

Grey squirrels have a varied diet and this includes song bird eggs, fledglings and even adults if they can catch them. They are also thought to raid the nests of dormice and eat the young.



In addition to being a predator, the grey squirrel is also a competitor which our native animals have not evolved to live with. The most notable example of this is the red squirrel which cannot eat hazel nuts at such an unripe stage as the grey can, giving greys an advantage where the two species meet.

The population of grey squirrels in the UK is estimated at 2.5 to 3 million. Many of our native songbird species are in decline, the reasons for this are complex but nest raiding by 2.5 million grey squirrels surely cannot help. Research by GWCT shows that the presence of grey squirrels in a woodland reduces the songbird population by an average of 15%.