

Red squirrel

Red squirrel ecology



Red squirrels do not hibernate but they do lay down stores of food to see them through periods when fresh food is not available. Where they are found in mixed broad-leaf and coniferous woodland they have a source of food all year round, as pine seeds are present over the winter months. However, red squirrels have quite a varied diet which includes seeds, buds, flowers, leaves and fruit. They are known to take insects, fungi and birds' eggs. Fungi is collected and dried by wedging it in the trees branches.

Red squirrels build nests, called dreys, from sticks and moss and placed high in the branches. They produce two litters of three to four kittens a year, usually in March and July. The drey is often the first evidence of the presence of red squirrels in a wood. Other signs are chewed pine cone 'cores' (birds leave ragged remains), split hazel nut shells (dormice make a hole to extract the kernel), cut tree shoots and scattered droppings.

Red squirrels can live for up to six years. They are chiefly active during the day and most of this time is spent foraging.

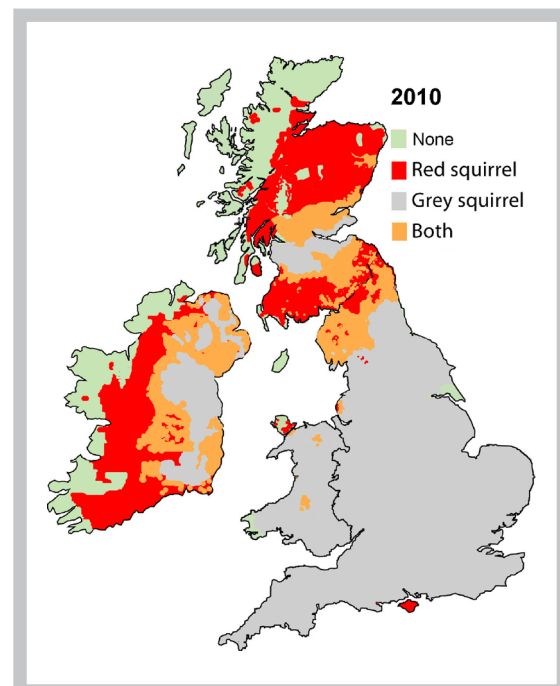
In the last 50 years, the dramatic decline in numbers has been due to loss and fragmentation of habitat, disease and in particular, competition from the introduced grey squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*).

The status of red and grey squirrels

Red squirrel: Classified as Lower Risk – near threatened by the IUCN Red List, and listed under Appendix III of the Berne Convention. Threatened in the UK, and protected under Schedules 5 and 6 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended).

Grey squirrel: Classified as a destructive pest in the UK under the Wildlife & Countryside Act (as amended) where it is listed under Schedule 9.

Distributions: In Wales, red squirrels are only now found in broadleaved woodland on Anglesey and sites next to the Menai Strait. Elsewhere in Wales populations are isolated in conifer plantations.



Size and pelage differences between red and grey squirrels

The native Eurasian red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*) is a lot smaller than the grey squirrel and is not seen as often foraging on the woodland floor.

Average adult red squirrel body measurements:

Body length: 190 – 210 mm

Shin length: 69 – 72 mm

Body weight: 270 – 330 g

Coat colour: Can be quite variable; some individuals appear dark brown, others a copper red. In many areas, the tail can fade or 'bleach' to a straw yellow colour during the summer months. Ear tufts are present during the autumn and winter months.

The North American eastern grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) was first introduced to the UK in 1876.

Average adult grey squirrel body measurements

Body length: 250 – 260 mm

Shin length: 76 – 79 mm

Body weight: 550 – 650 g

Coat colour: The coat is a grey colour but with areas of red particularly on the head and down the flanks. The tail has a conspicuous white edge.

Reintroductions

In 1998 there were only 30-40 red squirrels remaining in Pentraeth forest on Anglesey. Although the population expanded following localised grey control, the fragmented nature of the island's woodlands meant that a series of reintroductions were undertaken to speed up the spread of red squirrels. This process also enabled the genetic diversity of the island gene pool to be improved.

The first reintroduction took place in Newborough forest during 2004-2007. Animals were housed in large forest enclosures from which they, and any young produced, could be released. Although the reintroduction was a success, future projects housed squirrels only for three weeks before release and used small numbers of animals (6-8) per reintroduction to minimise adenovirus infection risks.

The following reintroductions have subsequently taken place:

2005-2007 – Penrhos Park (Holyhead)

2006-2007 – Henllys Hall (Beaumaris)

2008-2009 – Plas Newydd Estate (Llanfairpwll.)

2008-2009 – Carreglwyd Estate (Llanfaethlu)

2008-2009 – Hermon

2010-2011 – Dulas Estate (City Dulas)

2010-2011 – Marianglas

Source

Text and map: <http://www.redsquirrels.info/education/red-squirrel-conservation/> [Accessed 11 August 2015]

© Red Squirrels Trust Wales

Photograph: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Squirrel_posing.jpg (Author: Peter G Trimming – ©)

Reading

1. List four different facts that you learn about the red squirrel's ecology.

This question tests your ability to retrieve information using deduction and inference skills.

2. What is the meaning of 'destructive' as used in the text?

- a. extreme ☐
- b. harmless ☐
- c. causes damage ☐
- d. can be seen as evil ☐

This is a context question. You can identify the correct meaning of a word by reading and understanding the surrounding text.

3. What is the purpose of this webpage?

- a. to persuade ☐
- b. to inform ☐
- c. to entertain ☐
- d. to instruct ☐
- e. to describe ☐

This question tests your ability to use deduction skills to identify the purpose of a text.

4. Is the following statement true or false?

	True	False
A grey squirrel is longer than a red squirrel.		

This is a deduction question. You need to read the text carefully and show that you understand it.

5. The webpage explains how red squirrels have been introduced back in Anglesey. Do you think it was right to do this? Explain your reasons.

Critical response/justification – this type of question asks you to provide a clear explanation of your understanding of an extract from a text.

You will sometimes be asked to give a personal response in which you should include your own thoughts and feelings. Give valid reasons for your answer, including textual details to support your ideas if necessary.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on the right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

6. Which of the following could replace the phrase 'fragmented nature' in the text?

- a. patchy nature ☐
- b. uneven nature ☐
- c. torn nature ☐
- d. peculiar nature ☐

Writing

7. “We should let animals like the red squirrel die out rather than reintroduce them.” Do you agree? What do you think about this? Write about 400 words.

Remember to give your opinion and to give reasons for your opinions.

8. The Newborough forest park wishes to provide information leaflets for visitors about the wildlife and conservation work in the park. In your own words write a short introduction explaining the recent history of the red squirrels in Wales. Write 350-500 words.

Oracy

9. In small groups discuss the following question: “Is it right to murder one species to save another?”

Ensure that everyone has a chance to give his/her opinion and that you listen carefully to everyone.