

The Squirrel



The North American Grey Squirrel was introduced into Britain on several occasions between 1876 and 1929 and has now largely replaced the native red squirrel in all but a few parts of the United Kingdom. Throughout this leaflet it is the grey squirrel which is referred to.



What do they look like?

The adult grey squirrel is approximately 250mm long (10 inches), with a tail 230mm (9 inches) long. It weighs about 500 grams (just over 1 lb.).

As their name suggests grey squirrels are a uniform overall grey in colour. Grey squirrels are found in many locations and can survive wherever there are copses, shrubs or hedgerows to provide cover, which includes suburban parks and gardens.

They have long been recognised as a pest in woodland areas but they are also a problem in domestic situations.

When do they breed?

There are two breeding seasons each year. The young are born either between February and March, leaving the nest (or drey) in April/June, or between June and July, leaving the drey in August/September.

Each litter averages three to four young. Dreys are usually constructed in the fork of a tree between two and 15 metres (six and 45 feet) above ground level. The drey is lined with moss, grass or animal fur.

What do they eat

The diet of the squirrel varies but is mainly vegetarian, including the seeds of most types of trees, fruits and berries, buds and young shoots, but on occasion will include grain, fungi, birds eggs and young nestlings.

How can I tell if squirrels are about?

Signs that squirrels are present include pine cones from which the “wings” have been stripped to obtain the seeds at the base and acorns and nuts which have been split open. Large tooth marks can also be found on the caps of fungi such as mushrooms and on the bark of trees. Shallow troughs dug to search for food previously buried may be seen in lawns and grassed areas.

What problems do they cause?

Squirrels cause damage through their gnawing and their search for food. They are not thought to carry human diseases but they can still bite if they are cornered or frightened. If you do get bitten it may be wise to seek medical advice in case it is decided that you need an injection against tetanus. Squirrels may pass fleas on to domestic animals but this can be treated using animal flea treatments.

Damage to trees by gnawing of bark occurs mostly during May to July. Mainly hardwoods but especially sycamore and beech trees are attacked.

Squirrels readily inhabit lofts, attics and roof spaces as well as outbuildings and signs of their presence in a loft is the noise made by them when searching for nesting material. Droppings may be found although these can be mistaken for rat droppings. Squirrels can cause serious damage by gnawing cables, building structures and other vulnerable materials such as insulation

How can I control them?

If squirrels are infesting a roof space, then they can be denied access by sealing up all access routes using chicken wire securely fixed in place. You must make sure that there are no young or adult squirrels in the roof space before carrying out proofing works so that you do not trap them in the loft. Carrying out proofing in November or December will avoid the breeding season.

If this can't be achieved then the main methods of eradication are trapping, poisoning or shooting. This work is best left to a pest control company.

Spelthorne Borough Council does not offer a service for dealing with infestations of squirrels, but we can pass the details to our Pest Control Contractor who can give you a quote. Please contact Spelthorne's Customer Services 01784 451499