

**GREY SQUIRREL**  
*(Sciurus carolinensis)*

**OCCURRENCE**

The grey squirrel is not indigenous to the British Isles being a native of North America. Since being introduced into Britain it has flourished throughout the country at the expense of our native red squirrel which is now in decline. Grey squirrels now colonise our gardens, parks and towns feeding from our bird tables and dustbins, and nesting in our lofts having become fully urbanised.

**APPEARANCE**

An adult grey squirrel is about 250mm long with a bushy tail of about 220 mm and weighs 512 grammes. Its upper coat is dense silver grey hair with white under parts. The squirrel can often be observed sitting upright on its powerful kangaroo-like hind feet clutching food in its well adapted dexterous forefeet (see illustration).



**LIFE CYCLE**

There are two main breeding times each year, the first litters of young being produced in February and March and the second litters in June and July. The gestation period is about 45 days and litter size is usually 3 - 4 young which are tended by the lactating female and suckle until weaned at 10 weeks old. A squirrel's nest is called a drey which is a cohesion of sticks usually in the fork of a tree high in its canopy. These dreys are resting dreys occupied by both males and females throughout the year, breeding dreys being lower in the trees canopy, larger and lined with grasses and moss. Sometimes large holes in trees are utilised as breeding dreys and are lined in the same manner.

**FEEDING HABITS**

A squirrel's diet consists of most tree seeds, fruits and nuts, (particularly acorns and beech masts) as well as tree bark, bird's eggs and young. When food is in plentiful supply it is buried in various locations for future consumption. Squirrels do not hibernate in winter but go through periods

of inactivity in severe weather feeding from the 'caches' of food stored in summer and autumn. Urban squirrels colonising our gardens have adapted well to feeding from bird tables, digging up bulbs and eating fruits from ornamental shrubs and cultivated fruit trees.

### **SIGNS OF INFESTATION**

Apart from obvious and unmistakable sightings of adult Squirrels, signs of presence can be nuts and acorns split open and bark stripping and deep scratch marks on trees. Hind footprints can be noticed on soft ground which is five toed and always showing distinct claws. Urban squirrels inhabiting lofts can be detected by loud banging noises and the forming of dreys made from the yellow fibre glass insulation material used in lofts.

### **DAMAGE**

Squirrels cause significant damage to trees by stripping bark and sycamore and beech are particularly favoured. When trees are grown on a commercial scale then damage can be expensive, especially as young tree stock can be killed after being ringed barked. Urban squirrels can damage lawns by digging, uprooting bulbs and gnawing garden buildings and bird boxes. The damage which should cause most worry is the potential damage to electrical cables, pipe lagging, roof sarking felt and insulation blanket when urban Squirrels occupy lofts of domestic dwellings.

### **CONTROL**

Grey squirrels are not protected by law and control methods exist in the form of trapping, poisoning and shooting depending largely on situation.

The prevention of access to lofts by proofing is the best long term method and potential entry points can be noted and advice on proofing given.