

## **Grey Squirrels**

The Grey Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) is an introduced species that has flourished in England. It likes a very varied diet, which includes fruit, nuts, seeds and grain, bulbs, green shoots and leaves, tree bark, eggs, young birds, insects and domestic food waste. They are exceptional climbers and bold jumpers. It does not hibernate.

### **Life cycle:**

Grey Squirrels make nests called dreys, which are normally, built from twigs and leaves, however when they choose to nest in lofts they normally make the nest from insulation material.

Grey Squirrels have 2 breeding seasons a year. The female carries her young for 45 days before giving birth to 3 or 4 young. The first litters are born in February/March and are weaned at about 10 weeks. The second litters are born in June/July and the young are ready to leave the nest in August / September.

### **Problems:**

The most serious problem in urban areas is caused when squirrels enter roof spaces, normally during the breeding season. Once inside they chew woodwork, electrical wiring, tear up insulation to form dreys and occasionally drown in cold water storage tanks.

In gardens, they will take fruit, buds and flowers from plants, strip bark from trees, take young birds and eggs from nests and dig up bulbs from lawns. In parks and woodland they cause serious damage to trees, particularly sycamore and beech.

### **Control:**

The most effective control is exclusion. Do not encourage them into your garden by feeding them. Ensure that roofspaces in your property are secure and have no gaps that would allow squirrels to enter. Gaps in eaves or fascias are best protected with ½" wire netting firmly nailed or stapled in place.

Shooting: Individual squirrels may be shot by the owner or occupier of the land or by a person nominated.

Trapping: This can be with either:

- a live catch cage trap, which may be set in the open or in a building i.e. a loft space. Any non-target species must be released. Any pest species must be humanely destroyed. (It is an offence under the Protection of Mammals Act 1996 Section 1: to mutilate, kick beat nail or otherwise impale, stab, burn, crush, drown, drag or asphyxiate any wild mammal with the intention to cause unnecessary suffering.), or
- a spring trap designed and approved under the Spring Trap Approval Orders 1995 for use against squirrels. With the exception of the Kania trap (USA), all spring traps must either be set in a tunnel if used outdoors or may be set inside a building i.e. a loft space.

Under the Protection of Animals Act 1910 Section 10 all traps must be inspected at least once daily between dawn and dusk

Poisoning: Under the Grey Squirrels (Warfarin) Order 1973 squirrels may also be poisoned with a bait of plain wheat containing 0.002% Warfarin liquid. This not available for amateur use.

**Legislation:**

The main legislation relating to grey squirrels and their control is

Destructive Imported Animals Act 1932: Grey squirrels may not be kept in captivity without a licence issued by DEFRA.

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981: Captive grey squirrels may not be released or allowed to escape into the wild.

Spring traps approval Order 1995: Lists spring traps approved for killing grey squirrels.

Grey Squirrels Warfarin Order 1973 (revised 1997): Poison bait may only be used under the terms of this Act

Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996: Prohibits the cruel treatment of wild mammals but allows legitimate pest control by humane means.