

# Threat in Great Britain

What are the threats to this species?

The major threats include habitat loss, hunting and most importantly, the presence of Grey Squirrels. Grey squirrels are about twice the size of red squirrels and are able to survive and live in areas much smaller and denser than red squirrels, therefore they are able to adapt quicker to habitat loss.

The biggest threat associated with grey squirrels is the transmission of a disease called Squirrelpox Virus. Though not affected, grey squirrels are the carriers of this disease which has been found to be fatal for red squirrels.

All it requires is one grey squirrel carrier to introduce it to local population of red squirrels and the virus will spread and can have a devastating effect. Transmission of this disease can be through contaminated feeding boxes, grey squirrels entering red squirrels homes and even by humans using the same equipment for catching grey squirrels to catch red squirrels without sterilising them.

See if you can spot a red squirrel in our woods!

# Background

Red Squirrels are a native species to countries in Europe and Asia. Their scientific name is *Sciurus vulgaris* and they are part of the rodent order like rats! There is an estimate of only 138,000 red squirrels left in Britain compared to 2.5 million grey squirrels. Of the 138,000 red squirrels approximately 120,000 are in Scotland, 15,000 in England and 3,000 in Wales.

## Introduction of Grey Squirrels

In 1876 grey squirrels were introduced to Great Britain, in Henbury Park, Cheshire from North America by the Victorians however, it is not clear as to why.

Within a couple of years the grey squirrels had adapted and multiplied rapidly outcompeting the red squirrels, whilst there was an increase in grey squirrels numbers the red squirrels numbers were decreasing rapidly.

## Red or Grey Squirrel

One way to tell them apart is that grey squirrels are much bigger and longer than red squirrels. Red squirrels also have tufts on their ears which are hair like, however grey squirrels do not. Another way to tell them apart is that grey squirrel tails have bands of different colours on each hair ending in white giving a 'halo' effect, although red squirrels may also have different colour tails the hair will all be one colour.



# Fun Facts

Here are some fun facts about red squirrels:

- ⇒ Like humans they can be right or left handed, this is shown when they eat pine cones
- ⇒ They have four fingers and five toes
- ⇒ They shed their ear tufts once a year, in late autumn
  - ⇒ Their young are called kittens same as cats!
- ⇒ Kittens are born without teeth or hair and with their eyes closed
- ⇒ They can swim and are good at it
- ⇒ Even though they are called red and grey squirrels their furs are not always of that colour and can vary depending on where they are found or what season it is



More facts can be found on :

<https://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-6l4f7q>

# How to Help

## Prevention of spread

There is not much that can be done to avoid grey and red squirrel interaction however there are other ways to reduce transmission of this disease for example cleaning and disinfecting feeding boxes daily. Equipment used to catch squirrels cleaned and disinfected after every use.



## Red Squirrels Northern England

You could help by making a donation to the Red Squirrels Northern England, this will be a great help in furthering conservation and research of red squirrels.

Please help by reporting any sighting of Red Squirrels on the website below:

<http://www.rsne.org.uk/sightings>

# Red Squirrel Project



## What is the Red Squirrel Project?

The Red squirrel Project is a programme dedicated to solely conserve Red Squirrels and it works across northern England

## How does the Red Squirrel Project help these species?

The project aims to secure and increase the red squirrel populations within the 17 reserves around the UK, through applied conservation science, whilst decreasing grey squirrel populations through humane culling and the illegalisation of grey squirrel release into the wild.

It also allows people to report any sightings of red squirrels which are vital in helping monitoring any changes in squirrel range and planning conservation work.

## What does Kirkley Hall do to support the Red Squirrel Project?

At Kirkley Hall we monitor and protect our local red squirrel population. We have created a forest trail to engage and educate our visitors by allowing them to come and walk among the red squirrels whilst learning new facts about them.

[www.rsne.org.uk](http://www.rsne.org.uk)