



Two different squirrels: the facts

The red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*)



© Neil McIntyre

Size: between 270 and 340 g in weight.

Appearance: despite their name, red squirrels can have coats ranging from almost black to chestnut or light brown on the back. The chest and stomach are white. They are famed for their characteristically long ear tufts, which are especially prominent in winter.

Food: eats mainly tree seeds but in spring and early summer also eats the buds, flowers and shoots of both deciduous and coniferous trees. Other foods include fungi, fruits, berries, caterpillars and even birds' eggs. Unlike grey squirrels, red squirrels cannot digest seeds with high tannin content, such as acorns, which limits the food sources available for reds.

Distribution: 75% (around 121,000) of the UK red squirrel population is found in Scotland. In the north, strong populations still exist in areas as yet uncolonised by grey squirrels. Red squirrels can also be found in some parts of central Scotland as 'pocket' populations and, although much reduced from their former range, can still be found in many parts of southern and south-western Scotland. The last remaining populations of red squirrels in mainland England are found in Northumberland, Cumbria, North Yorkshire and North Merseyside, which are continuous with the south Scotland populations.

Habitat: typically conifer forests to broadleaf woodland; favours Scots pine and Norway spruce forests, but also enjoys hazel and beech. They can also live in mountainous areas (with altitudes of 425 metres near Aberdeen).

Threats: Competition from grey squirrels, squirrelpox virus, habitat fragmentation and road kill.

Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels aims to stop the decline of red squirrel populations in key areas of Scotland north of the Central Belt and to improve conditions for viable red squirrel populations across Scotland. It is a partnership project between the Scottish Wildlife Trust, Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland and the Scottish Rural Property and Business Association. It is part of Scotland's Species Action Framework, which sets out a strategic approach to species management in Scotland. For more information, visit www.scottishsquirrels.org.uk.



The grey squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*)



© Darin Smith

Size: between 540 and 660 g in weight.

Appearance: upper fur is mainly grey with mid-brown along the upper back and chestnut over the flanks, limbs and feet. Their underside is white. The tail hairs are grey, banded with brown and black and a characteristic white fringe. They have no ear tufts, pale ears and have a larger, more robust build.

Food: Grey squirrels share food sources with reds. However, unlike red squirrels; grey squirrels can feed on seeds with high tannin content, such as acorns, thanks to differences in digestive physiology. As a result, more food sources are available to them and grey squirrels tend to put on 20% in body weight over the autumn, compared with 10% for reds. This gives grey squirrels an advantage in hard winters.

Distribution: 200,000 and 300,000 in Scotland (around three million in England). Grey squirrels have expanded across Scotland's entire central belt and are now spreading northwards through Angus, Perth and Kinross and Stirling. There is also a population of grey squirrels in Aberdeen city which is now spreading across Aberdeenshire. In south Scotland, grey squirrels carrying squirrelpox, are moving in from England.

Habitat: prefer oak, beech, sweet-chestnut and horse-chestnut habitats. Due to more efficient digestive processes, these habitats can support larger numbers of grey squirrels than red squirrels. Grey squirrels can also make use of conifer habitats (mainly Scots pine and Norway spruce) especially if there is good broadleaved habitat within 1 mile.

Threats: Minimal, aside from human control efforts and road kill.

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