

Reducing grey squirrel populations to protect broadleaf tree health from bark-stripping damage

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Tree damage

Grey squirrels, *Sciurus carolinensis*, are an invasive non-native species causing tree damage and local red squirrel extinctions.

Bark stripping of young broadleaf trees stresses, weakens and can kill individuals and impact large areas of new planting.

Grey squirrels target trees 10-50 years old, including ecologically and economically important species such as oak and beech.

High densities of squirrels strip bark from main stems and branches between April and September; annually repeating damage if the population stays high and unmanaged.

The 2021 Royal Forestry Society report¹ estimates damage to cost at least £37 million per annum in lost timber value, reduced carbon capture, damage mitigation, and trees to replace those that died.

The subsequent Royal Forestry Society survey² of landowners and managers showed that grey squirrels are still seen as the greatest threat to broadleaf trees. A reluctance to plant broadleaf trees because of damage can impact biodiversity.



Recommendations

The UK has ambitious tree planting targets to support climate change mitigation and many other ecosystem service benefits.

Management of grey squirrels should be a priority to help deliver healthy trees and woods that support people and wildlife.

A grey squirrel impact and assessment method and recording sheet is available on the UKSA website to help monitor damage³.

Collaborative landscape-scale management delivers more effective long-term results⁴. Volunteers can play a major role in sustainable management objectives.

Currently approved grey squirrel management methods are trapping, using licensed traps, and shooting.

The UK Squirrel Accord and supporters are funding Animal & Plant Health Agency research into a grey squirrel oral contraceptive and species-specific hopper.

Stakeholders should share experiences of the issues, raise awareness of solutions and best practice, and coordinate efforts.



1. Royal Forestry Society 2021. An Analysis of the Cost of Grey Squirrel Damage to Woodland.
2. Royal Forestry Society 2021. Grey squirrel control survey report.
3. UK Squirrel Accord 2021. Grey squirrel impact and assessment methodology and recording sheet.
4. Forest Research 2019. Controlling grey squirrels in forests and woodlands in the UK. UK Forestry Standard Note.



See the UK Squirrel Accord website for resources: www.squirrelaccord.uk

Contact the UK Squirrel Accord for further advice: info@squirrelaccord.uk

