



ENGLISH HERITAGE

# Landscape Advice Note: Squirrel Policy for English Heritage Properties



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Two species of squirrel are found in England, the endangered native Red squirrel and the common, introduced Grey squirrel. This Landscape Advice Note sets out English Heritage's policy on squirrels on its properties.

## INTRODUCTION

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The two different species of squirrel found in the UK are the Red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*) and the Grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*). Very occasionally albino (white) and melanic (black) forms of either species occur. Melanic forms are very rare in Red squirrels but in some areas melanic Grey squirrels are dominant.

Red squirrels are protected, rare and should be safeguarded on sites where they are present. Grey squirrels are not protected, common in most areas and populations can reach proportions where damage is done to other wildlife, trees, gardens and properties. In such situations control measures should be undertaken.

Grey squirrels carry, but are immune, to a virus which can be fatal to Red squirrels. In areas where Red squirrels are found, active control measures to prevent invasion by Grey squirrels will be undertaken.

## RED SQUIRRELS

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Red squirrels are a protected species (under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981). The Red squirrel population has declined considerably in the last century and they are restricted to a few locations in England – principally Northumberland, Cumbria and the Isle of Wight. Red squirrels do not pose a threat to trees, plant collections or other wildlife. They are generally extremely shy creatures and are not known to enter buildings or to pose a threat to staff or visitors on sites.

On the few English Heritage sites where Red squirrels are found all possible measures will be taken to protect and encourage them. Where any form of pest control is undertaken on these sites, only measures which are guaranteed not to harm this species will be employed.

## GREY SQUIRRELS

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Grey squirrels originate from North America. The first recorded introduction was in 1876 (although there are recorded sightings of grey squirrels as early as 1828) and this was followed by numerous other releases over the next 50 years. Once it became apparent that this species was spreading

unchecked throughout the country a Prohibition Order preventing their import or release, was issued in 1937. It is an offence under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 to release grey squirrels into the wild, which means that squirrels caught in non-lethal traps must be humanely destroyed and cannot be released elsewhere

Grey squirrels are common in most parts England and are found on a large number of English Heritage sites. They will strip bark from trees particularly when their numbers are high. Bark stripping is extremely disfiguring to trees and can be lethal and therefore a serious risk in historic parks, woodlands and tree collections. Grey squirrels can also be extremely damaging to other wildlife, particularly birds, stealing both eggs and nestlings. They also carry, but are unaffected by, an appalling disease called Squirrel Pox which devastates Red squirrel populations where the two come into contact. Grey squirrels are much bolder than their Red cousins and are often found to enter roof spaces where they will gnaw cables and pipes. In many places they are tame. People often forget they are wild animals and over familiarity can result in painful bites or scratches.

In most cases, given existing methods, it is not practical to attempt eradication. However control of numbers to levels which prevent or minimise damage is feasible.

## ENGLISH HERITAGE POLICY

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The English Heritage Properties Steering Group has approved the following policies regarding squirrels at English Heritage properties:

- Take all reasonable measures to control Grey squirrel numbers to prevent or minimise damage to trees, plants and other wildlife
- Take reasonable measures to prevent both deliberate and inadvertent feeding of squirrels
- Where Red squirrels are present English Heritage sites should take all possible measures to control Grey squirrel numbers with eradication as the principal aim and using methods which cannot harm Red squirrels
- Liaise with any local or regional Grey squirrel control efforts



FRONT COVER  
Red squirrel at Osborne House  
© English Heritage

IMAGE 01  
Grey squirrel damage at Mount Grace  
Priory © Christopher Weddell

IMAGE 02  
Red squirrel at Appuldurcombe House  
© Christopher Weddell

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The role of English Heritage's Curatorial Department is to help everyone to be inspired and engaged by the Story of England through sites, artefacts and archives.

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