

Squirrels



Description

There are two species of squirrel in Great Britain. The red squirrel, which is confined largely to Scotland and the grey squirrel (*sciurus carolinensis*), which is found all over the country. The adult grey squirrel weighs approximately 275g, has a body height of approximately 25 cm and a tail length of approximately 20 cm.

Biology & Habitat

The grey squirrel was deliberately introduced to Britain from North America over 100 years ago. Since then it has spread throughout most of mainland England and Wales. The squirrel traditionally lives in a drey—built of twigs and leaves in the forks of trees. The drey is used for shelter and for breeding. There are two breeding seasons in a year, the first litters are born in February and March after a gestation period of about 45 days. The young are weaned at about 10 weeks old. The second litters are born in June and July, leaving the nest in August and September. The average litter size is 3-4 young. The young squirrel is sexually mature at about 9 months, so the spring litter become reproductively active in late December and January.

Importance

The most serious damage in urban areas arises where the squirrel enters the roof spaces of houses by climbing the walls or jumping from nearby trees. Once inside, they chew woodwork, ceilings, and insulation on electrical wiring or tear up the loft insulation to form a drey. The noise nuisance from a litter of squirrels can cause many sleepless nights. They are also a pest in the garden—they raid fruit crops, bird feeders and can cause damage to trees by stripping the bark, which often results in the weakening of young shoots and a misshapen tree.

Squirrels can carry a variety of diseases, but they are only transmittable to other squirrels.

Control

The best method of control is to proof the building/loft. Prevention is better than cure. This is the best advice a pest control officer can give anyone who has a problem (this goes for all pests). If a cure is required the best form of control is trapping with the use of a Kania squirrel trap.

A hole need only be as big as a squirrel's head to allow access. If they have been seen entering the property, their access points will be known, but otherwise a piece of newspaper stuffed securely into a suspected access hole can be easily removed by a squirrel and will show that a hole is in use.

The RSPCA advise the use of strong wire netting with a mesh size no larger than 25mm to block any access holes, plus repair to any slipped slates, rotten soffits or missing bricks etc. to prevent access.

If the squirrels have already gained entry, it is essential to ensure there are no squirrels remaining in the loft before access is blocked. Not only is it cruel to trap them (and illegal to cause suffering to a captive animal), they may do additional damage in their attempt to escape or in a mother's attempt to rescue her young. The decomposition of any squirrels that die may also cause smell and insect infestation. Squirrels can attack when frightened or to defend their young, so take care and make noise to frighten any squirrel out of the loft before you enter.

Treatment

Lethal control of squirrels is permitted but should only be carried out by qualified professional pest control officers. The use of poisons is strictly regulated for use by professionals only and should never be undertaken by members of the public. It is an offence to live trap and release a squirrel back into the wild.

For Pest Control treatment: 01454 868001

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