

# Grey squirrel

*Sciurus carolinensis*

**Invasive: High impact**

## Species profile

- Habitat:** Terrestrial.
- Distribution in Ireland:** Widespread and common throughout the country except for west of the Shannon and the south west.
- Status:** Established.
- Family name:** Sciuridae.
- Reproduction:** Breeding is seasonal with 2 peaks in spring and summer. Gestation period is 44 days with an average litter size of 3.

## Identifying features

- Colour:** Grey, but coat can vary greatly throughout the seasons and have tinges of red.
- Size:** Species is larger than the native red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*). Grey squirrel has a head and body length of 240-285mm in comparison to the smaller red squirrel which has a range of 180-240mm.
- Weight:** Wide variation in body weight but have an average range of between 480-650g.



Grey squirrel showing pale coat and white underside  
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No tufts of hair coming from ears which is a distinguishing feature of the red squirrel.  
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Grey-silver with brown coat accompanied with a white underbelly are distinctive qualities of the grey squirrel  
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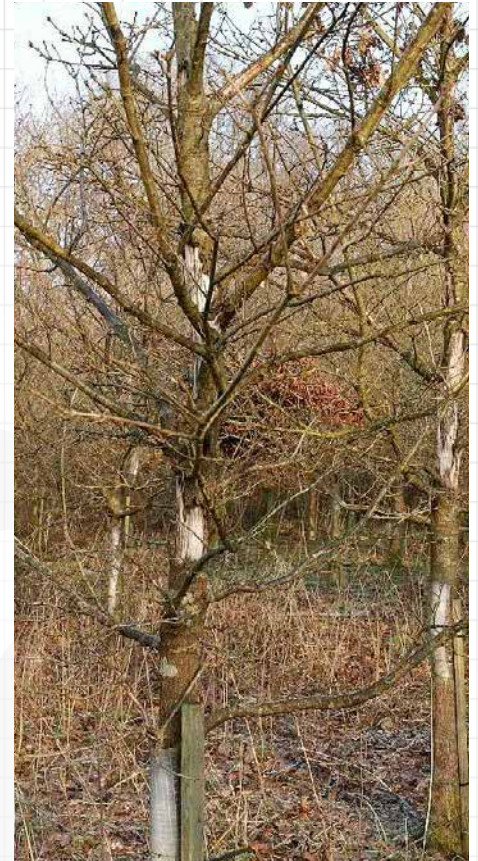
## Threats

Has a negative impact on the red squirrel due to competition for food and space.

Species carries the squirrel pox virus (SQPV) which recently is known to affect red squirrels in Ireland. The red squirrels develop myxomatosis type symptoms and die shortly afterwards. This may cause a decrease in numbers of red squirrels.

Can damage timber by bark stripping of both commercial forestry and those planted for amenity and conservation value etc.

Can cause an alteration to the canopy of a woodland community by targeting certain tree species for bark stripping more than others.



Bark stripping caused by grey squirrels  
- Forestry Commission Crown ©

## Seasonal variation

**Summer:** Grey squirrels will often be at their brownest during this time of year.

**Winter:** Grey squirrels will generally look grey/silver in colour at this time of year.

## Similar species

Most similar to the red squirrel especially when the grey squirrel is in its winter coat.



The native red squirrel showing its colouring and distinctive ear tufts  
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Grey squirrel showing a darker coat which may cause confusion between the native red squirrel if seen at a glimpse  
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Red squirrel which has died from the squirrel pox virus (SQPV) - © GBNNSS

