

PEST CONTROL DEPARTMENT

SQUIRRELS

The grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) is an introduced species which is now common throughout most of England. Squirrels are often viewed as an attractive addition to our wildlife and they regularly frequent gardens.

However, they may become a nuisance and, where they gain access to buildings, the chewing of materials, including electrical wiring, can cause damage and pose a fire hazard.

They also strip bark from trees, which causes serious economic damage in woodlands. Competition for food and habitats with the native red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*) has contributed to the decline of the red squirrel.

BIOLOGY AND BEHAVIOUR

Grey squirrels are found in a wide range of situations, from urban parks and gardens to rural woodland. They spend part of their time foraging on the ground but are always within easy reach of trees.

Foods eaten include acorns, beech mast, nuts, fruits and bulbs. They will also sometimes take birds' eggs and nestlings.

Grey squirrels usually have their young either in dreys (nests made of twigs and leaves) or in holes in trees.

They will also breed in roof spaces where they may build their nests from loft insulation or other available materials.

Grey squirrels do not hibernate but are less active during periods of cold weather.

They normally have two litters each year; the first in February to March and a second in June to July. The litter size averages three to four, and the young are independent at about three months of age.

The grey squirrel's main food supplies of acorns and beech mast vary in abundance from year to year and this has an important influence on breeding success and survival.

SQUIRREL CONTROL

Where control measures are justified, the most approach will normally be to use traps.

However, poison baiting may be the most cost-effective measure for removing squirrels from loft spaces.

The choice of control technique will depend on the situation and the type of damage.

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Control can either be carried out by private individuals, other occupiers or a pest control contractor. Hyndburn Borough Control currently makes a small charge for providing this service.

PROBLEMS IN BUILDINGS

These occur mainly where squirrels gain access to roof spaces. In these situations, they may cause damage to electrical wiring, insulation or other materials, and the noise they make can create a nuisance. In such cases the aim should be to remove the grey squirrels from the roof space and then humanely despatch them. The access points should be proofed to prevent further invasions. Whenever possible, control should be undertaken outside the breeding season.