

Fox Squirrel

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Species Description

Scientific name: *Sciurus niger*

AKA: Bryant's fox squirrel, eastern fox squirrel

Native to: North America

Habitat: Deciduous and mixed-forest habitats, prefer areas with open understory and winter-storable food

Sciurus niger is the largest tree squirrel species in its native North America. They grow to a total length of 454 – 698mm (tail 200 – 330mm) and weigh 507 – 1361g.

Due to decreasing numbers within its native range, 44 introductions were made in an attempt to conserve the population. Although not present in Northern Ireland or any European country; due to the extraordinarily high success rates of introductions (less than 20 individuals can establish viable populations) the Fox squirrel is identified as a high risk invasive non-native species.

There are 10 recognised sub species of fox squirrel, with significant variation in appearance.

Under the Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order (Northern Ireland) 2019 it is offence to intentionally keep; breed; transport to, from or within Northern Ireland, use or exchange Fox squirrel; or to release it into the environment.

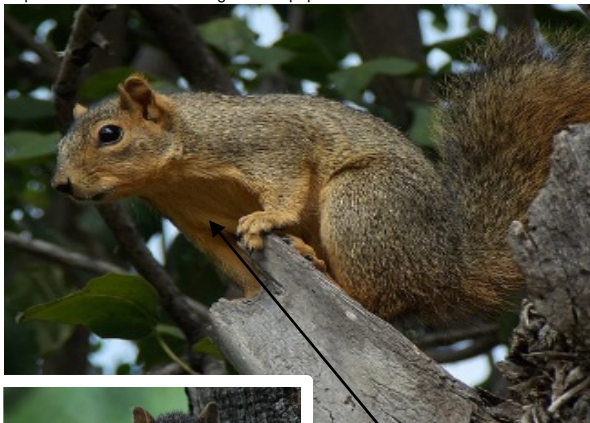


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Key ID Features

Coat colour varies significantly with sub species. Melanism is also common.

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The underside (venter) can be white to cinnamon but is usually reddish brown

In Western and Northern United States fox squirrels can have grizzled fur with a suffusion of buff to orange

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Black crown and nape

White or cream nose, ears, and feet,

Underside is tan

Southeast populations (*S. n. shermani*) in the United States have dorsal fur grizzled black over silver and silver over black.



S. n. cinereus from the central United States coast are silvery grey

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Buff on the hips, feet, and head; the tail is pale grey; the underparts are white to pale grey but may be cinnamon

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Report any sightings via; CEDaR Online Recording - <https://www2.habitas.org.uk/records/ISI>, iRecord app or Invasive Species Northern Ireland website - <http://invasivespeciesni.co.uk/report-sighting>

Environmental impacts

- In North America within its new invasive range it outcompetes several native squirrels (*Sciurus griseus*, *Tamiasciurus douglasii* and *Sciurus aberti*)
- Through its feeding behaviour, *S. niger* would likely impact upon breeding birds in Northern Ireland

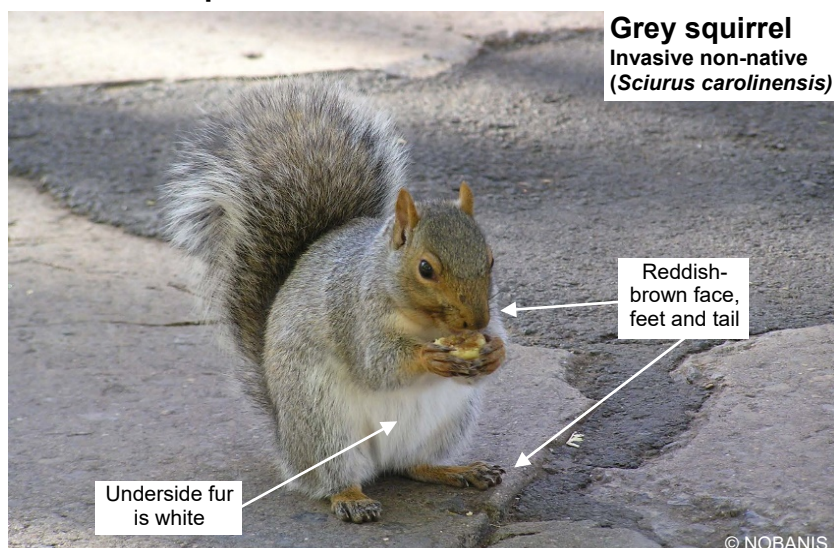
Economic impacts

- It is likely that *S. niger* will affect the reproduction of some tree species, enhance the prevalence of some diseases (e.g. West Nile Virus and Raccoon roundworm - *Baylisascaris procyonis*) and parasites, and favour their transmission to the native fauna.

Pathways

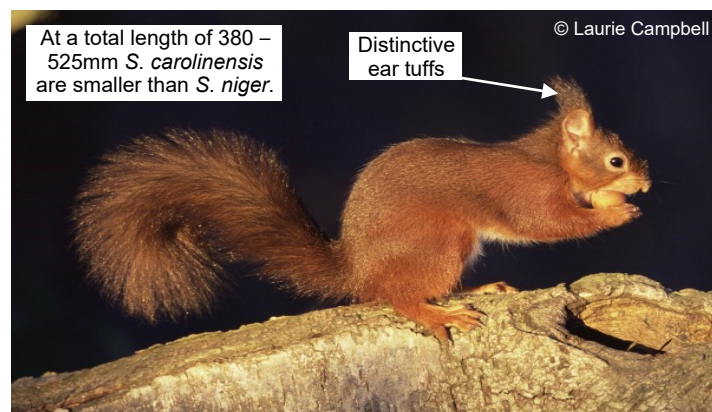
- Ornamental or pet trade and subsequent escapes from captivity
- In North America spread has been assisted by humans. Live-trapping and releasing; by home owners trying to get rid of an annoying individual and also by hunters seeking to improve hunting opportunities in a new location.

Similar Species



Red squirrel

Native
(*Sciurus vulgaris*)



References and further reading:

Baiwy, E., Schockert, V. & Branquart, E. (2015) Risk analysis of the Fox squirrel, *Sciurus niger*, Risk analysis report of non-native organisms in Belgium. *Cellule interdépartementale sur les Espèces invasives (CiEi)*, DGO3, SPW / Editions, updated version, 34 pages

CABI *Sciurus niger* (Fox squirrel) datasheet - available at <https://www.cabi.org/isc/datasheet/64742>

UNEP-WCMC. 2010. *Review of Callosciurus erythraeus and Sciurus niger*. UNEP-WCMC, Cambridge.

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