

# Grey Squirrel

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## Species Description

**Scientific name:** *Sciurus carolinensis*

**Native to:** North America

**Habitat:** Forest and grassland

Medium-sized tree squirrel (20-25cm long), bushy tail (15-20cm). Upper fur mainly grey with gingery-brown along the back, flanks, tail, limbs and feet; undersides white. Melanic forms occur. Also, erythristic forms with red-brown backs that can lead to confusion and misidentification with red squirrels. Abundant throughout Northern Ireland and is still expanding its range.

Introduced from; USA to approximately 30 sites in England and Wales between 1876 and 1929, from Canada to 3 sites in Scotland between 1892 and 1920, and from England to 1 site in Ireland in 1911 and from there progressed throughout the island to its current range in both Ireland and Northern Ireland.

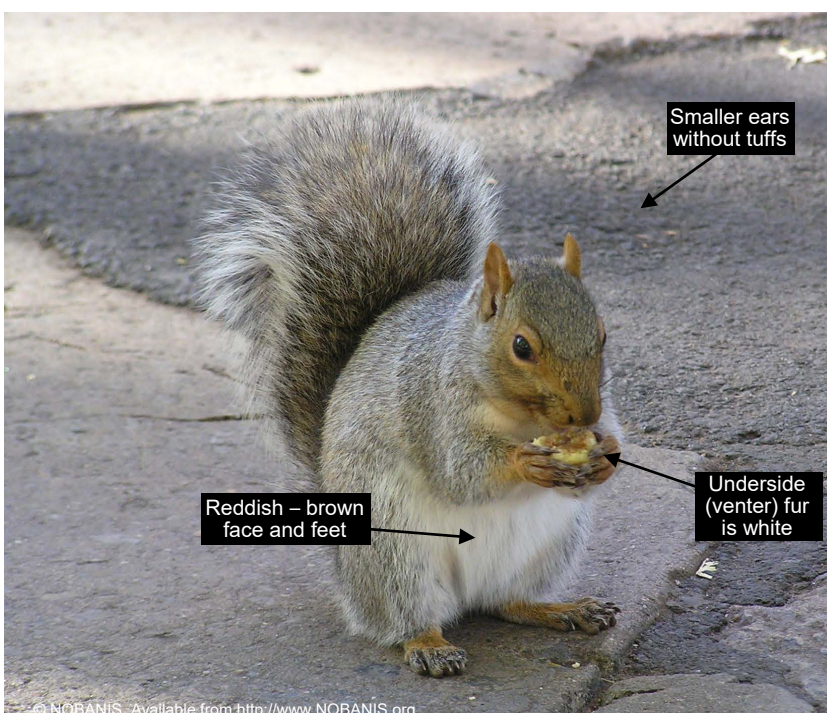
*Sciurus carolinensis* compete with native red squirrels and often carry the squirrel pox virus, which they have developed an immunity to. However the squirrel pox virus is usually fatal to the native red squirrel.

**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 Grey squirrel; or to release it into the environment.**



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## Key ID Features



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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>

## Identification throughout the year

The coat colour of the grey squirrel can vary greatly throughout the year, commonly having have tinges of red. Grey squirrels can have red fur down their back and on their feet, while some red squirrels can appear very grey.

## Field Signs

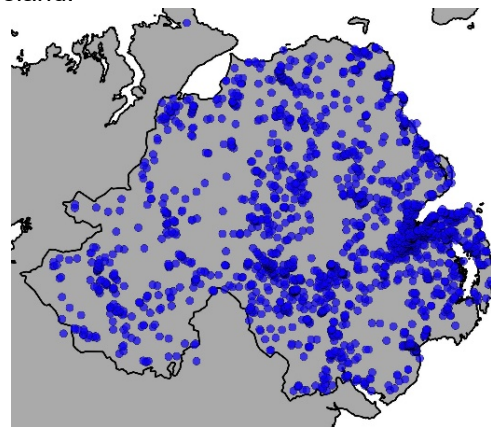
The nests of grey and red squirrels are known as dreys. They are spherical collections of twigs and leaves approximately 30cm across. They are usually located at the forks of branches, close to the trunk of the tree and are at least 6m above the ground. They are much easier to observe during the winter.



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## Distribution

Grey squirrel is abundant throughout Northern Ireland.



Source: NBN atlas Northern Ireland <https://northernireland-species.nbnatlas.org/species/NHMSYS0000332764> - check website for current distribution

## Similar Species

Red squirrels (*Sciurus vulgaris*) can have a widely varied coat colour, from almost black to chestnut or light brown, with the chest and stomach are white. They have long ear tufts which are especially prominent in winter.

### Native red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*)



White chest  
and stomach

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The effects of  
squirrel pox virus

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### References and further reading:

Mayle, B.A. and Broome, A.C. (2013), Changes in the impact and control of an invasive alien: the grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) in Great Britain, as determined from regional surveys. *Pest Management Science*, 69:  
McInnes, C.J., Coulter, L., Dagleish, M.P., Deane, D., Gilray, J., Percival, A., Willoughby, K., Scantlebury, M., Marks, N., Graham, D., Everest, D.J., McGoldrick, M., Rochford, J., McKay, F. and Sainsbury, A.W. (2013), Squirrelpox in Ireland. *Animal Conservation*, 16: 51-59.  
Teangana, D.Ó., Reilly, S., Montgomery, W.I. and Rochford, J. (2000), Distribution and status of the Red Squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*) and Grey Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) in Ireland. *Mammal Review*, 30: 45-56.

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