

# 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.**

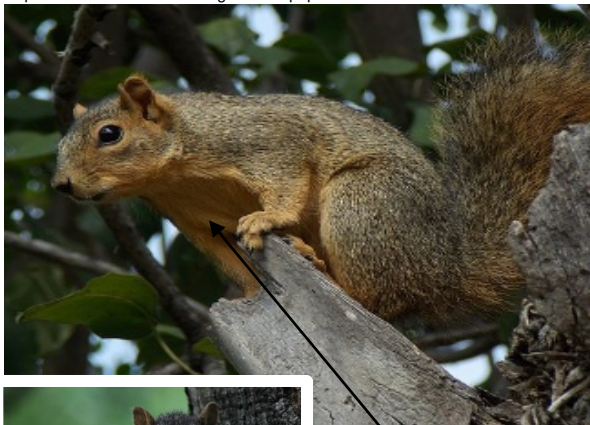


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## Key ID Features

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

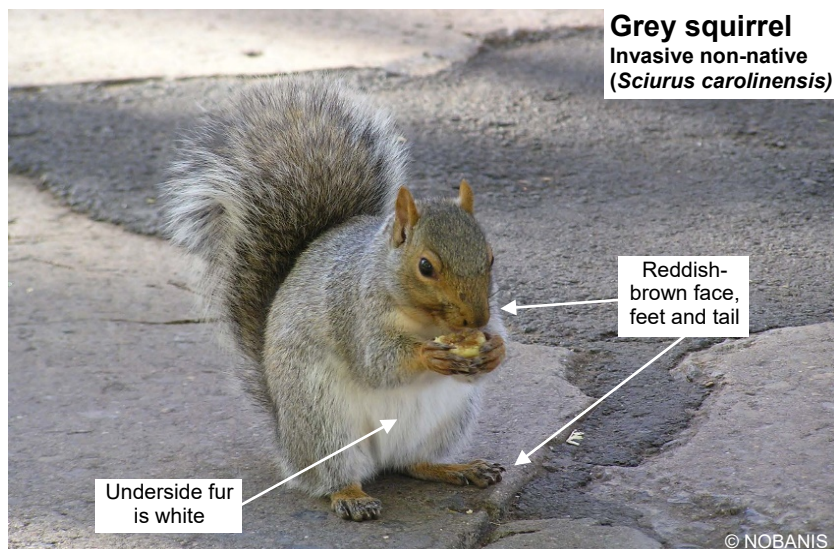
## Economic impacts

- 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

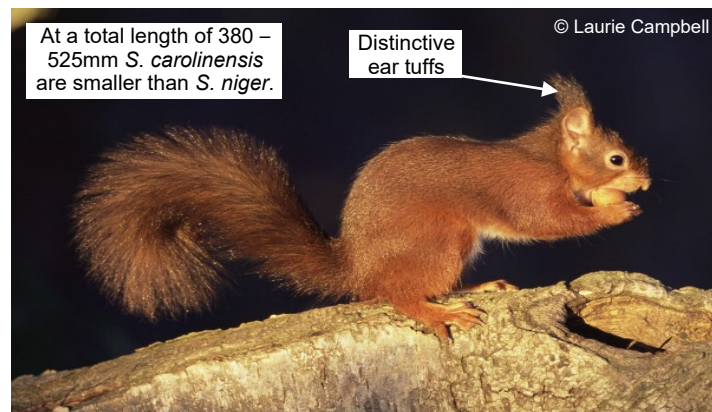
- Ornamental or pet trade and subsequent escapes from captivity
- In North America spread has been assisted by humans. Live-trapping and releasing; by home owners trying to get rid of an annoying individual and also by hunters seeking to improve hunting opportunities in a new location.

## 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.