

Grey Squirrel

Sciurus carolinensis (Gmelin, 1788)

Order: Rodentia

The only squirrel currently found in Cornwall, the grey squirrel is one of our most frequently seen mammals and is regarded as a pest in many circles. The grey squirrel reaches a maximum body size of about 280 mm with a tail of another 215 mm and weighing up to 720g. The winter coat is a speckled grey above with white underparts, in the summer the shorter coat is more brown, with reddish patches along the flanks and paws. Black (melanic) and albino individuals are not unusual. A very vocal animal which can often be heard barking and churring in response to threats from other squirrels and predators. Hind paw prints are about 45 mm long with the central three toes long and narrow and equal in length. The front paw is about 35 mm long and has 4 toes. Droppings are similar in size and shape to rabbit droppings and are often left on prominent branches, bird tables or the tops of tree stumps.



Grey squirrels produce one or two litters of three young each year in a football-sized nest, or drey, built in close to the trunk of a mature tree. They also produce dreys in which small groups of individuals may sleep. Breeding females are strongly territorial and will chase away other squirrels, often with a loud chattering scream. They may live for up to 10 years

Grey squirrels occur in open woodland and parkland preferring woodland with a good proportion (over 25%) of mature trees, especially oak. They eat primarily buds, flowers, fruits and nuts, the grey squirrel will also eat fungi, insects, birds eggs and fledglings as well as garden produce.

There are few natural predators in the UK, although foxes may have an impact in conifer plantations, and most deaths are probably related to starvation, accidents and human intervention. In captivity animals may live to 20 years but in the wild this is closer to 3 or 4.

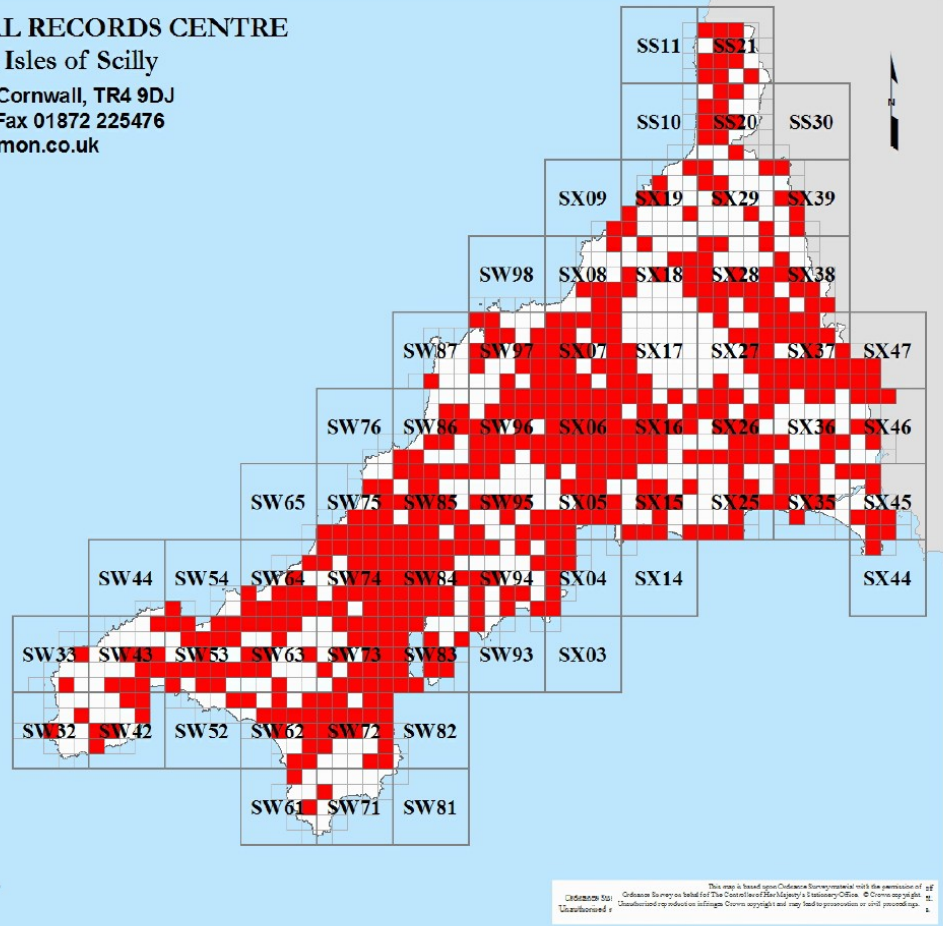


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Cornwall Mammal Group
Grey squirrel
Sciurus carolinensis
As of September 2009

Legend

-  Grid 10 Km
-  Grid 2 Km (Tetrad)
-  Grey squirrel records, 2000-2009



Local distribution and key sites

The map shows that the Grey Squirrel is widespread, patchily distributed and probably under-recorded throughout Cornwall.

Number of records per date class

2002 to 2006 inclusive 1308
1997 to 2001 inclusive 160
All records previous to 1997 536

The grey Squirrel was introduced from the eastern USA between 1876 and 1929 at over 30 sites across the UK. It has since spread to cover most of England and Wales south of Cumbria. There are small pockets of grey squirrels in Scotland. Generally absent from Europe apart from small areas of Italy.

Survey Methods

- Garden surveys
- Drey transects
- Road kill reports
- Forestry pest control

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Did you know?

The grey Squirrel can leap over 4 m between trees and jump 3 m from the ground. It is also a capable swimmer.
Grey squirrel apparently tastes like a cross between duck and lamb and is a popular item on the butcher's counter at Kingsley Village.
Grey squirrels are often held to be responsible for the decline of the native red squirrel, possibly through outcompeting for food as the red squirrel cannot digest acorns, possibly through the introduction and transmission of the parapox virus which is lethal to the red squirrel.

Key references

- Holm, J. (1987) Squirrels. Whittet Books, London.
- Gurnell, J. et al. (2008) in Harris, S. and Yalden, D.W. (Eds.) Mammals of the British Isles: Handbook, 4th Ed. The Mammal Society.