

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 570g. 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 and most deaths are probably related to starvation, accidents and human intervention.

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Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*

Legend

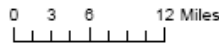
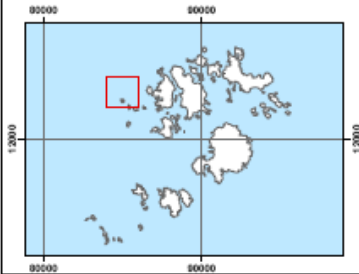
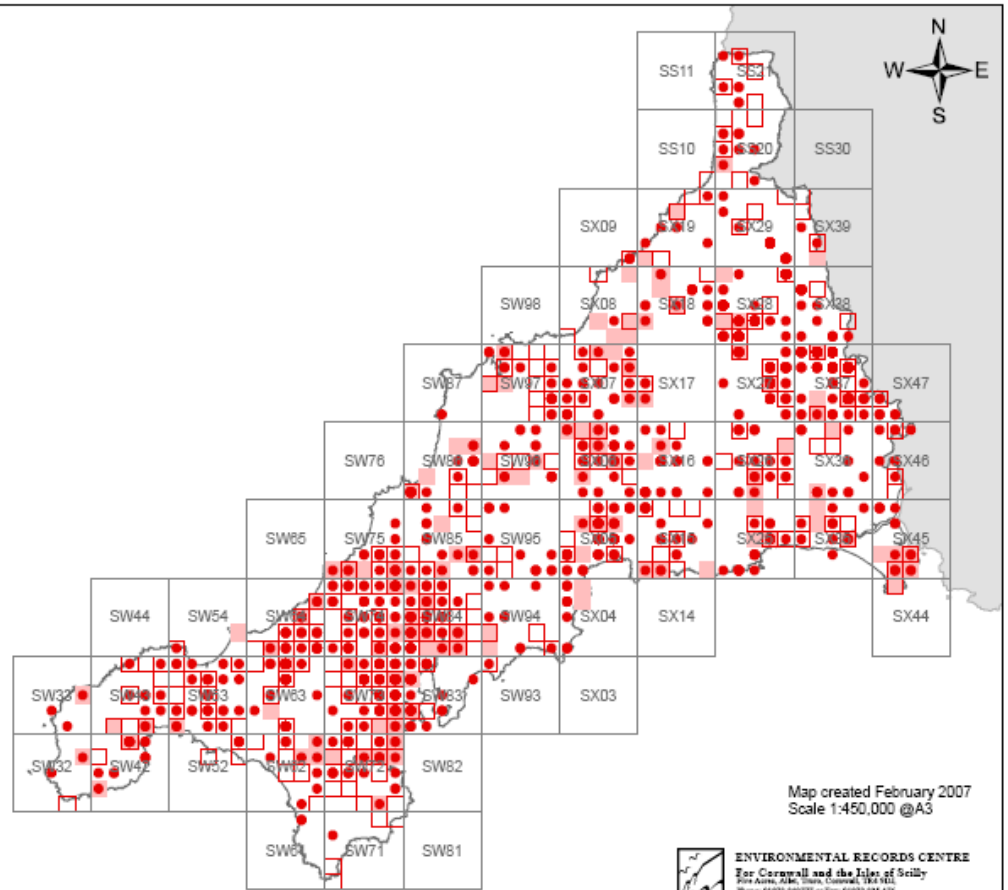
Records from 2002 to 2006 inclusive



Records from 1997 to 2001 inclusive



All records previous to 1997



Map created February 2007
Scale 1:450,000 @A3



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Local distribution and key sites

The map shows that the Grey Squirrel is widespread, patchily distributed and 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

Total 2004

The grey Squirrel was introduced from the eastern USA in the mid 19th Century. It became

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