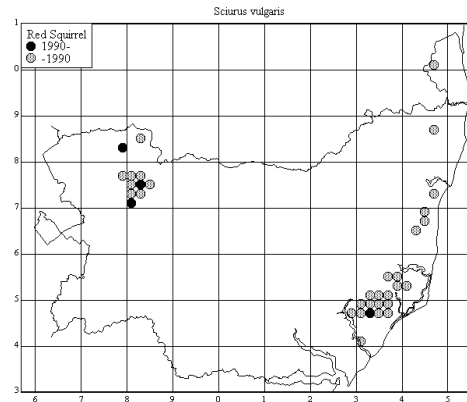


Red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*)

The Red Squirrel was formerly widespread in the UK in woodlands and forests before the introduction of the Grey Squirrel. It is now absent from most of England. It is particularly adapted to conifers, but also occurs in deciduous woods in the absence of Grey Squirrel.



1 Definition

The Red Squirrel is the only native British squirrel. Its fur colour varies from bright ginger to red or dark brown and it can be tinged with grey in winter. Other distinguishing features are the large ear tufts, which appear in mid-winter and disappear by the summer. An adult Red Squirrel weighs around 350g.

Red Squirrels are active during the day, but in summer they may rest for an hour around mid-day. They nest in dreys; round structures made of twigs in a tree fork or hollow. They are lined with hair, mosses or grass. Several Squirrels may share the same drey.

The main food source is tree seeds such as hazel nuts and seeds from conifer cones. Red Squirrels will also eat tree flowers, shoots and fungi growing on tree bark. Grey Squirrels are thought to eat hazel nuts before they are fully ripe, which the reds cannot. Reds can survive on smaller seeds such as conifers, hence their occurrence in several conifer woodlands.

2 Current status

2.1 National

Red Squirrel populations have suffered a marked decline in the UK over the last 50 years with the introduced Grey Squirrel replacing the species throughout most of England and Wales. The Red Squirrel is now largely confined to Scotland, Ireland, northern England and parts of Wales, although isolated populations persist in southern England at Poole Harbour Dorset, Isle of Wight and Thetford Forest in East Anglia.

Grey Squirrels appear to be better adapted to the current fragmented British woodland and displace Red Squirrels within 15 years of their arrival. The current population of Red Squirrels is estimated to be about 160, 000 (30,000 in England) (JNCC, 1995).

2.2 Local

There has only been one possible sighting of Red Squirrels in Thetford in the last two years (2001 – 2003). When the re-introduction programme was shut down (2001) the remaining Squirrels from the breeding pen were released into the wild, but no recent survey has been undertaken to establish numbers. In Suffolk Red Squirrels only occur within the Brecklands Natural Area including Thetford Forest.

3 Current factors causing loss or decline of the Red Squirrel in Suffolk

- The spread of Grey squirrels and subsequent competition with them
- Disease (Parapox virus)
- Fragmentation of suitable habitat

4 Current Action

4.1 Legal Status

The Red Squirrel is fully protected and listed on Appendix III of the Bern Convention, and is protected by Schedules 5 and 6 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

4.2 Management, research and guidance

- A 2000-hectare Red Squirrel reserve at Thetford Forest has been established. Translocation of 22 Squirrels into this area took place in the summer of 1996.
- A breeding programme was undertaken with the objective of planned release to maintain the population. This was discontinued in 2001 because the project had run its planned period. It was demonstrably not practical to remove all Grey Squirrels from the study area. There was also the strong likelihood of the animals succumbing to parapox. It was decided not to continue releases until either a vaccine could be found or at least the answer to how the parapox virus was transferred from greys to reds was understood.
- The Red Squirrel is subject to a English Nature Species Recovery Programme which operates nationally.
- A six month trapping project has just been completed (2003) with funding from FC and FE. A report on location of traps, bait types etc. is expected by the end of the year.

5 Action Plan Objectives and Targets

- 1 Maintain the 2000 ha reserve in Thetford Forest in suitable condition for Red Squirrel, until research work provides answers to the parapox virus issues. This involves maintaining a larger level of Scots Pine than in other areas of the forest and keeping broadleaf areas to a minimum for landscape purposes.
- 2 Keep up to date on national research which could benefit the Red Squirrel population remaining within the reserve area. Contribute to national research where feasible and implement results of any findings. The three main threads of research which are/ need to take place;
 - Methodology for trapping greys
 - The way the parapox virus is carried by greys and transferred to reds
 - Parapox vaccine research

6 Red Squirrel: Proposed Action with Lead Agencies

Action	Date	Partners
POLICY AND LEGISLATION		
Seek to ensure that the needs of Red Squirrels are taken into account when reviewing or preparing Indicative Forestry Strategies.	Ongoing	FC, LAs
SPECIES MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION		
Continue to record any sightings of Red Squirrel within Thetford forest and pass details to SBRC.		FE
Undertake forest management within the reserve until research provides assurance that the population can be sustainable (see Objective 1).	2007	FC, FE
RESEARCH AND MONITORING		
Ensure that any national research into Red Squirrel ecology, bait hoppers, Red/Grey interactions, methods of grey squirrel control, habitat management etc are available to inform any future re-establishment projects.	On-going	FC
Pass information gathered during survey and monitoring work to SBRC & JNCC in order that it can be incorporated in a national database and contribute to the maintenance of an up to date Red list.	On-going	FC, EN, PTES
ADVISORY		
Ensure that any guidance on forestry design to benefit Red Squirrels is available to relevant forest managers.	On-going	FC, EN, PTES
COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY		
The balance between Red and Grey Squirrel populations is an emotive issue. Produce a leaflet to give clear information explaining the relationship between reds and greys. Make available to the public and landowners, especially where control measures are being undertaken.	2007	FC, PTES