

Grey Squirrel

Species Description

Scientific name: *Sciurus carolinensis*

AKA: Eastern Grey Squirrel

Native to: North-central, North-eastern and South-eastern USA and South-eastern Canada

Habitat: Deciduous and coniferous woodlands; also occurs in open habitats e.g. gardens and farmlands (if sufficient cover is present).

Grey Squirrels are medium sized tree rodents with a 38-52cm body length and a 15-25cm long tail. They are predominantly grey in colour, although their head, back and tail may possess a reddish-brown tinge. The underside of the animal is solid white, whilst the tail may show black colouration on the tips of the fur. In rare cases, melanistic individuals may occur by which the entire squirrel will appear a solid black colour with no other visible pigmentation.

Records suggest the first sighting within the UK was at Llantysilio Hall in Denbighshire in 1828. Initially these animals would have been purposely released into formal estates and gardens as an ornament, although their adaptability has allowed their populations to rapidly swell and spread into the wider countryside. Since 1938 it has been illegal to import Grey Squirrels into the UK or keep them as pets. Furthermore, under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, it is illegal to intentionally release this species or otherwise allow it to escape into the wild once captured.

This species can cause significant environmental damages including stripping bark from trees which ultimately leads to the plant's death. It also displaces the UK's native Red Squirrels and both carries and spreads the squirrel pox virus which can infect squirrels and humans alike. Aggression (including biting) towards people has also been reported within certain populations.



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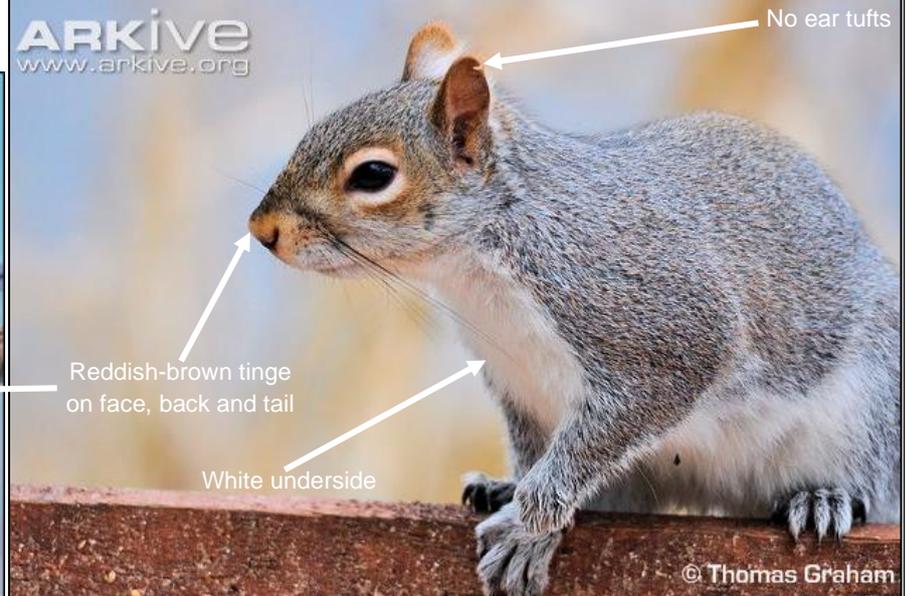
Key ID Features



© Philippe Henry

Largely grey body colour

ARKive
www.arkive.org



No ear tufts

Reddish-brown tinge on face, back and tail

White underside

© Thomas Graham

Identification throughout the Year

Grey Squirrels maintain a grey coat year-round, although colour tones may vary slightly between the summer and winter months. During the summer months, these rodents are likely to have a noticeably thinner coat compared to what can be seen throughout the winter where they grow thicker fur to aid with insulation. Melanistic individuals may also occur whereby part or all of the animal will have a solid black colouration.



Similar Species

Red Squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*)
[Native]

The Red Squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*) is the UK's only native squirrel species, although its future is becoming increasingly uncertain due to the introduction of their grey counterparts and persistent habitat loss. Where territories overlap, Grey Squirrels often outcompete their native equivalent for essential resources including food and shelter. These pressures combined have caused, *S. vulgaris* to disappear from much of the British countryside.

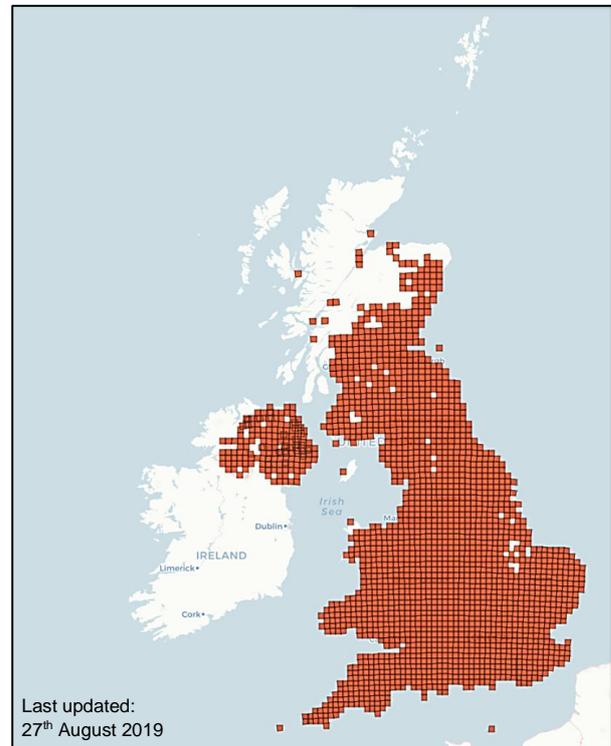
These tree dwelling rodents are visually very similar but can be distinguished by their differences in the colouration of their coats. Red Squirrels are typically copper-red whereas their grey counterparts are almost completely grey, albeit with reddish-brown tinges on the upper side of their tail. Both species have a white underside.

Grey Squirrels are also larger, typically growing to be around 38-52cm in body length, whereas the red species grow to approximately 18-24cm (excluding tail length). Furthermore, Red Squirrels possess distinctive tufts of fur on their ears, a feature not seen in their grey cousins.



Distribution

The Grey Squirrel is abundant throughout the UK and is currently expanding its range both within the country and throughout much of mainland Europe.



Source: NBN Atlas. Check website for current distribution.

References and Further Reading:

DAISIE (2009) *Handbook of Alien Species in Europe*. 2nd edn. The Netherlands: Springer, p. 371.

Holm, J. (1987) *Squirrels*. London: Whittet.

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Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust (2018) *Grey Squirrel*. Available at: <http://www.nottinghamshirewildlife.org/animal-facts/grey-squirrel> (Accessed: 30th January 2019).