

## Facts on Squirrels



### Why are squirrels a problem?

The first problem is they are among the best-loved animals. There is something about their big eyes, bushy tails and silly antics that tugs at the heart-strings of many. However, grey squirrels are vermin. They cause damage by nesting in buildings, digging in lawns, eating ornamental plants and bulbs and stealing food from bird feeders. In attics they chew woodwork and ceilings, strip the insulation from electrical wiring, tear up fibreglass insulation for nesting and drown in water tanks. They cause damage to forestry, woodlands and parks where they damage trees by stripping the bark.

### Behaviour

Squirrels use two basic types of natural shelter – tree cavities or dens and leaf / twig nests or dreys. They become active at first light, rest in the middle of the day and become active again later in the afternoon (known as diurnal). They have a home range of less than four acres.

Grey squirrels do not hibernate, but may lay up in their nest for long periods in very cold weather, venturing out occasionally to search for hidden stores of food.

They spend more time foraging and feeding on the ground than in trees. They are very agile in trees. The hind feet are double jointed allowing it to scramble head first up and down trunks. If it falls it can safely land from heights of 9m, and can leap more than 6m.

### Feeding

The diet of squirrels varies with the season and the availability of the plant material that is the basis of their diet. It includes nuts, acorns, flowers, fruit and fruit buds, fungi, bird eggs and nestlings. Surplus food is often buried for later retrieval, which is found by smell rather than memory.

### Breeding

Squirrels have two litters a year, the first between February and April and the second in August or September. After mating the female drives the males away and raises the two to five young by herself. The babies are born naked and helpless and do not venture out of the nest for seven or eight weeks. They are weaned at ten to twelve weeks. The spring litter is usually driven away by the mother shortly after weaning and as the next breeding cycle begins. The autumn litter may stay with the mother in the nest through the winter until well after the winter courtship season.

### Control

Red squirrels are protected. Therefore only grey squirrels can be controlled. The use of cages, traps and poisons is all highly regulated therefore it is important to entrust this to professionals. For example, grey squirrels cannot be released when caught in a cage. Shooting is the other common form of control.

**For more detailed information and a free telephone consultation call 0845 838 0634.**

**Specialists in Pest and Vermin Control**