

Red Squirrel Factsheet

Red squirrels are native to Great Britain, but are now an endangered species. The non-native grey squirrel was introduced to England from America in the late 1870s and is the primary cause of decline of the red squirrel.



Red Squirrel Facts

- Their scientific name is *Sciurus vulgaris*.
- Reds eat seeds, buds, flowers, shoots, nuts, berries and fruit from many trees and shrubs. They also eat fungi and insects, and occasionally birds' eggs.
- They store nuts in the ground in the autumn.
- They can be right or left-handed when they eat a pine cone!
- They will occasionally strip bark from trees (usually conifers).
- Reds moult their coat twice a year, once after winter and then in the late summer before the weather gets colder again.
- They moult their ear tufts only once a year, in late autumn.
- They can live to six years of age.
- They have four fingers and five toes.
- They are not always red in colour but can also be brown, almost black or quite grey!
- They weigh 275-300g, the same as four Mars Bars or a packet of biscuits.
- Their body is 18-22cm long and their tail is 14-19cm in length.
- Reds live high in trees in a nest made from twigs, leaves and moss. This is called a drey.
- The drey may be in a hole in the tree or set against the trunk and branches.
- Pregnancy lasts 36-42 days and their young are called kittens.
- Kittens are born with their eyes closed, without teeth and with no hair. After about seven weeks they look just like small versions of their parents and are ready to leave the drey.
- There can be two litters a year, with 3-4 kittens in each litter.
- Average densities in conifer and broadleaf areas are 0.5-1.5 Red per hectare.
- They do not hibernate over winter, but may be less active when weather conditions are bad.
- They can hang upside down!
- They can swim!
- Reds are extremely susceptible to Squirrelpox virus, which is lethal.

IMPACT OF GREY SQUIRRELS ON RED SQUIRRELS

- The grey is larger (an adult grey is about a third larger than an adult red), heavier, more aggressive and predatory in looking for food and shelter and can force the reds to retreat to conifer plantations.
- Greys can eat a much wider variety of food than reds. Greys eat seven times more than reds and will out compete reds in their pursuit of food.
- Over 60 per cent of greys in England and Wales are estimated to carry squirrelpox virus, which is deadly to reds. Squirrelpox virus was first recorded in Cumbria in Spring 1998.



Grizedale

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Spotted!

Reporting a Red Squirrel sighting in and around Grizedale Forest

How many Red squirrels did you see?

On what date and at what time did you see the Red Squirrel(s)?

Where did you see the Red Squirrel(s)?

Please provide a grid reference from a map, a GPS coordinate, or detail of any landmark or feature e.g. a bridge, forest sculpture, trail name or track junction.

Where was the Red(s) when you saw it?

(Was it in a tree or on the ground?)

Was it in or near a tree species that you recognised? If so, what was it?

Have you ever seen a Red Squirrel before and if so where?

Please provide your name, an email address and/or telephone number in case we need to ask you any questions about your sighting. If you provide contact details, we will only use them to follow-up your sighting report and for no other purpose.

Once we've validated the reports we record them on our sightings maps at www.westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk/squirrels/maps

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form!

Please hand it in to the **Grizedale Visitor Centre** or post it to **Secretary, Westmorland Red Squirrels, Sedgwick Cottage, Sedgwick, Kendal LA8 0JP**

Spotting Reds in Grizedale

Spotting squirrels can be difficult. Greys, because of their numbers, are often seen in Grizedale, but reds only rarely. This doesn't mean that there are no reds in Grizedale: they are there but take some spotting! To have a chance of seeing a Red you have to be quiet and patient because reds are notoriously shy animals. If you are walking or watching quietly then a good indicator of squirrel activity can be the sound of debris falling in the woods. Sometimes this will be because a squirrel is eating nuts or pine cones in the canopy. A good time for seeing reds is in the early morning and late afternoons, especially on calm, sunny days.

Reds can be seen on the ground, on tree trunks and branches and in the tree canopy. All too often, it is just a fleeting glimpse as the animal moves at speed into cover. Although reds spend much of their time high up in the trees, they love to run along fallen trees and large branches because from this slightly elevated position they can search more easily for food on the ground while keeping an eye out for predators. A fallen tree that is used often by squirrels may have scratch marks along the length of it or even collections of cones that have been nibbled at. Cones make up an important part of the red's diet so where there are squirrels there is cone debris.

Red or Grey?

Colour: Surprisingly, coat colour is not a reliable indicator. Greys can often have very red fur and reds' coats can vary from a bright, rusty red to quite a dark colour, sometimes grey or almost black.

Ear Tufts: Greys never have ear tufts, so if the squirrel you've spotted has ear tufts, it is definitely a red squirrel. But if ear tufts are absent, it could still be a red that you've seen, so you should look for other distinguishing features. Ear tufts on reds are moulted in the summer and become more prominent in winter.

Size: An obvious distinguishing factor is size, with greys generally being much bigger and stockier than reds. However, there are individual variations and young greys will reach a similar size to adult reds before they become fully-grown. In a mild weather and with a good supply of food greys will carry on breeding well into the autumn months, so young greys are not just seen in the spring.

Tail: Another way to tell the difference is to look carefully at the tail. Each individual hair on a grey's tail is made up of bands of colour, with each one having a white tip. Together these white tips combine to create a distinctive white 'halo' effect around the tail which is visible even in poor light. Reds can have tail colours varying from dark to almost white, but there is no 'halo' effect because their individual tail hairs are not banded like a grey's.

Reporting and More Information

Please report any red or grey squirrel sighting at the Grizedale Visitor Centre using their sighting report form or direct to Westmorland Red Squirrels at:

www.westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk/sightings

Further information about red squirrels and our work to protect them can be found at:

www.ruslandhorizons.org/project/ruslands-reds.aspx or at the Westmorland Red Squirrels site at

www.westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk