

SHARING OUR SPACES: GREY SQUIRRELS



Practical advice for living alongside our wild neighbours

Squirrels are common throughout the UK and pose no threat to you or your family – in fact, they often delight and entertain us with their impressive acrobatics and visits to local parks!

Despite the commonly held belief, the decline of Britain's red squirrels cannot be attributed to the grey squirrel. Red squirrels suffered badly from deforestation, severe winter weather, and epidemic diseases such as coccidiosis, declining to near extinction in the eighteenth century. More red squirrels were then introduced from Europe, where they continue to do well, and maintain strongholds in conifer forests, mostly in Scotland, where greys are either absent or less adapted to conditions. Both red and grey squirrels strip bark from trees, however this behaviour is sporadic and damage is greatly overstated.

Nevertheless, you may be concerned about them eating food intended for birds, or nesting in your attic and causing damage. If so, this factsheet is designed to provide practical advice for living alongside squirrels.

SUMMARY

- Reduce available food. Use airtight storage containers and secure bins
- Do not intentionally feed squirrels
- Stop feeding wild birds until the squirrels leave, and then always use squirrel-proof bird feeders
- Add capsicum or chilli powder to bird food. It's harmless to birds but will deter squirrels
- Make sure no animals are inside before blocking access to roof spaces and buildings
- Use squirrel repellent around bird feeders
- Purchase sonic repellents for use in attic spaces. There are also sonic devices suitable for outdoor use, but it is illegal to use them in areas where bats live



Killing grey squirrels

Killing squirrels is costly, ineffective, and highly unethical. Kill one squirrel and another will simply take their place – the only winner of pro-cull initiatives are the so-called 'pest' control companies. A long-term, effective solution is to deter squirrels in the first place; they only come to your property looking for food or shelter. Deny them these and they will soon move on.

In your garden

Squirrels quickly adapt to any available food source, so if you regularly feed wild birds, you're likely to also attract squirrels. To conserve supplies, squirrels will 'stash' food for leaner times, burying it in pots or the ground. While this can cause damage, please remember that this is a survival tactic and not an assault on your pots or plants. Squirrels will also eat fruit and nuts from garden trees when available.

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What can you do?

Stop feeding wild birds on the ground or on tables, instead utilising 'squirrel proof' bird feeders, which are available at most garden centres. Secure feeders tightly to branches or specific poles to prevent removal; a temporary pause on feeding birds altogether may also encourage existing squirrel visitors to move on.



Potted plants can be protected from digging and burying by using squirrel repellents, also available from garden centres, which can be sprinkled around problem areas. Ribbons and balloons may deter squirrels from trees.

In attics and roof spaces

Your attic or roof space is appealing to squirrels seeking somewhere warm and safe to raise their babies. If you see a squirrel on your roof carrying dry grass, shredded newspaper, or other nesting materials, then it is likely to be a female building a nest. They may occasionally cause damage or a disturbance as they move around.

What can you do?

Ensure trees, shrubs, and climbing plants do not provide easy access to your roof. Blocking entrances is very important: squirrels tend to enter under the edge of tiles or in the soffits. Squirrels can squeeze through surprisingly small gaps, so ensuring every possible access point is blocked will really help. However, please make sure that no squirrels, babies, or other animals are trapped inside before blocking access points, as this

could cause suffering as well as putting you in breach of wildlife protection legislation.

Sonic repellents can also be used to evict squirrels from attics. These plug-in devices are inexpensive and can be purchased from DIY stores or online. Please note that it is an offence to harm or block bat roosts – even unintentionally. If in doubt, contact the Bat Conservation Trust's helpline on 0845 1300 228.



Squirrels are widespread and, as many people actively encourage them, we should learn to be tolerant with these animals. However, if they are causing genuine concern and the above methods have failed, there are more sophisticated deterrents available.



For more advice contact Humane Wildlife Solutions:
www.humanewildlifesolutions.co.uk or phone 07771 361226

