



SPECIES

Photos: Norman Crowson, Norman Crowson

Red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*)

Information: Rosalind King

All about the red squirrel

- Red squirrels mostly stay high in the trees, rarely coming down to the ground. They build nests called 'dreys' high up from twigs, leaves and moss, which look like large, messy bird nests.
- Red squirrels can be bright ginger to dark brown and are much smaller than grey squirrels.
- During autumn and winter, red squirrels develop distinctively tufted ears.
- They do not hibernate, but may have a slightly longer sleep during colder winter days, called 'winter torpor'.
- Red squirrels eat seeds, fruits, lichen, fungi and nuts but they can live off pine seeds.

Why do red squirrels need our help?

Red squirrels are our only native squirrel and there are estimated to be around 287,000 left in Britain. They are in decline following the introduction of grey squirrels from America; Greys carry squirrelpox which Reds aren't immune to, so Reds can only live where Greys can't reach or survive.

How can we help?

- If you live near red squirrel areas, avoid planting tree species with large seeds, such as hazel or oak as this can encourage grey squirrels.
- If you have grey squirrels nearby, or live near a busy road that squirrels would need to cross, then don't put out food for Reds.
- If it's safe to feed them, put the feeder off the ground away from predators and only provide supplemental feeding. Feeding in summer is best, as that is when their natural food supply is lowest.

How can we help?

- If it is safe to feed red squirrels, they eat hazelnuts, sweet chestnuts, sunflower seeds and pine nuts. Take care with peanuts (they mustn't be mouldy and don't give them too many) and feed them bone meal, apple and carrots to help with calcium and vitamin enrichment.

DID YOU KNOW? Red squirrels have double jointed ankles and can jump over 2m, which is 8 times their body length!

How do I monitor and record?

- The quickest and most effective way to monitor red squirrel populations is through monitoring the occupation of nestboxes (dreys). During autumn and winter, populations can be surveyed through the use of feeding stations.
- If you see any red squirrels in any unexpected areas, take a photo and send the record into iRecord.

Learn more

- woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/animals/mammals/red-squirrel/
- wildlifeonline.me.uk/animals/article/squirrel-distribution-habitat/
- wildlifetrusts.org/saving-species/red-squirrels/helping-red-squirrels-your-garden/
- Contact an A Rocha UK naturalist at naturalist@arocha.org