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A photograph of a squirrel with grey and brown fur climbing a tree trunk. The squirrel is positioned vertically, facing right, with its front paws gripping the bark. The background is a soft-focus autumn scene with yellow and orange leaves.

Overwhelming Support
for Grey Control



Editorial

Dear Supporters

I have been in reflective mode over the last few months, with time to think about my career to date, including the woodlands I have been managed and the clients that I have had the privilege of working for.

The creation of forests has been a significant part of my working life as a professional forester. Thousands of hours of design, drafting and submitting proposals, budgeting, securing grant support, public consultation, Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA's) contracts & approvals. All of this before one can agree on tree orders, protection measures, contract delivery, completion of ground preparation, fencing and tree planting. This work proceeds in the 24 months before and during the first year of a new broadleaved woodland. Once planted, the work of establishment does not stop there. In subsequent years there is weeding, beating up, deer control, monitoring for disease outbreaks, cleaning and keeping the finances working. The first decade or so is

fraught with manageable but periodically intensive stress. This process continues right across the UK, with a view to providing all of the climate change, biodiversity, water quality, recreational, economic and landscape changes that should follow and lead to better long-term resources emanating from new forests.

In one short month after a decade of human endeavour, much of that work can sadly be undone by the grey squirrel. All those hours of discussions, professional input, contractor sweat and tears combined with years of biological growth can be ruined unless grey squirrel populations are kept in check. Thousands of man-hours, thousands of growing days, all undone.

In my article inside this magazine, I outline that the investment of the UK



Graham Taylor

taxpayer has probably exceeded c. £1 billion over the course of my career. This public investment has resulted in some success, some partial success and yet also so much failure over that time.

It is behoven upon all of us to continue to strive to improve grey squirrel control and seek to solve the problem once and for all.

Keep up the good work in the 2026 control season!

Graham Taylor MBE FICFor

Jigger Writes...

2025 - A Different Year

On the Estate where Paul and I work as squirrel trappers, the squirrels usually come in twice a year. A few at first, then in a week they are everywhere till we eventually get on top of them.

Then later it happens again, but it was different this year as the weather was very mild and food was plentiful. It seemed they were constantly breeding as we were catching pregnant females and young ones for ages, but we did get their numbers down in the end.

As for the weather, it continued. In the church yard there were Primroses out before Christmas, and it was nice to be out in the woods.



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ESI Update - by Andrew Kendall, ESI

The last 12 months have been busy as ESI continues in its battle against the grey squirrel. We are proud to be one of the only organisations to openly use the word eradication. Grey squirrel control will not work, and it is important that this message gets across to the government and its agencies.

No more is the failure of grey control made apparent as in the article in this magazine by Graham Taylor. In it he calculates that government has spent a minimum of over £976m in taxpayers' money to support woodland creation in England and Wales, together with a further £209m being spent of establishment of broad leaved woodlands. In the article Graham says that the general consensus among private foresters and landowners who represent the majority of where these trees are being planted, is that around 30% of replanting in private forests has been dramatically affected by grey squirrel damage.

These are not insubstantial figures and begs the question: is this good value or should the UK taxpayer invest more in help solving the grey squirrel crisis within broadleaved woodlands?

The good news is that ESI is continuing to pursue the application of

gene editing as the only solution to the grey squirrel problem. It is very encouraging to note that in a survey conducted by ESI earlier this year 78.5% of those surveyed were in favour of using genetic techniques to control the population of grey squirrels and other invasive species.

It only goes to show that the great British public are more robust and open to new technology than our politicians and government agencies would have us believe.

As part of its work, ESI conducts an opinion survey every 3 to 4 years and asks a range of questions. This is reported more fully elsewhere in the magazine, however it is very encouraging to see that amongst the general public there is a high awareness of the impact that the grey squirrel has not only on our native red squirrel but also on our trees, with a significant percentage, 70.5%, supporting grey squirrels control.



Andrew Kendall has been involved with ESI since its founding in 2002, and is responsible for the day to day operation of the charity.

ESI is supporting the work into gene editing by Professor Bruce Whitelaw and the Roslin Institute and has recently commissioned further research work at the APHA.

ESI continues to be contacted by the media and other opinion formers for its views and thoughts on grey squirrels, the damage they cause and the best way of eradicating them. We take the lead and that has always been our stance.

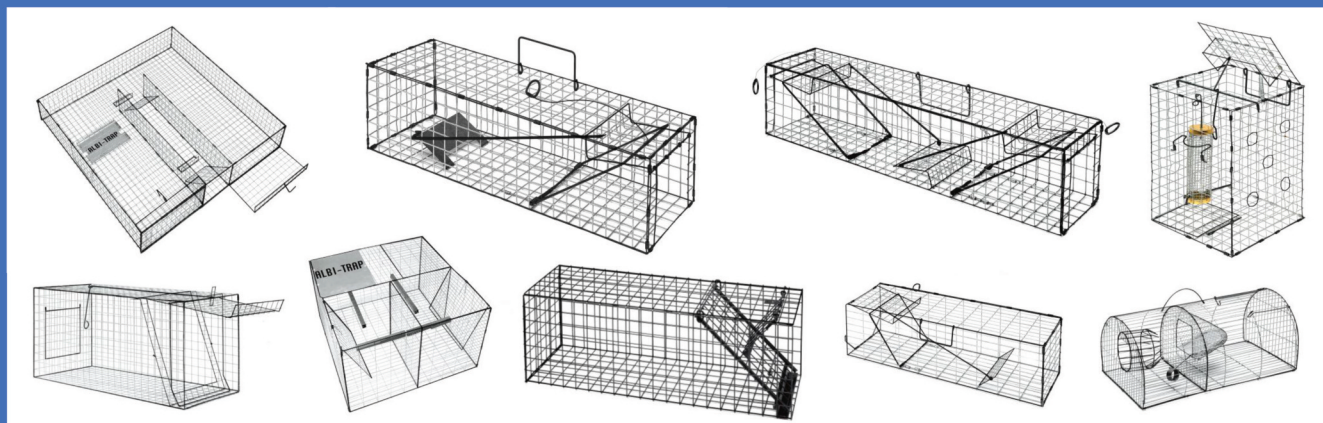
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Feature

New Research Reveals Tree Species Resilience to Grey Squirrel Damage

By Charles Dutton FICFor, ESI Trustee

The argument to find a solution for the removal of grey squirrels has been well made by others, not just control but the removal of the alien pest.

The IUCN conference in 2002 gave us a strong steer as to what methods and policies have worked well elsewhere and there are plenty of examples. These can be found in their summary book called 'Turning the tide, the eradication of alien species'. It is encouraging that our own RSPB are using the IUCN guideline on Gough Island in the South Atlantic to help save a rare Albatross.

ESI has long signed up to these guidelines and that is way it is so keen on the Gene Drive method of control. However, ESI recognises that it may be some time before Gene Drive is acceptable, approved and ready to be rolled out.

In light of that, CD has published his long awaited research document into which broadleaf trees can be grown without getting damaged and why this is the case, in the hope that it will give the next generation of foresters some comfort about which broadleaves to grow and to perhaps not waste so much public money in planting grants, and with half an eye on climate change.

In 2005, a private client of Charles Dutton, contacted him, saying that many of his Poplar trees were being severely damaged and could he visit and offer advice. It was an amazing site and it can be visited on Sept 11th with the RFS. The site was one of four site across England, planted by the Forestry Commission as part of a FC research project, growing blocks of the eleven new clones from Belgium. There were planted in block of 49 tree (7 x 7) and replicated randomly three time across the site. The grey squirrels had ONLY damaged three of the eleven clones (Columbia River, Trichobel and Fitzy Pauli). What was amazing was that the

damaged trees had a damage score of 4 / 5, frequency 10, ie, every tree was severely damaged in the individual block. However, the next door row of trees, did not have a mark on them. My thinking at the time was that the phloem of the damaged trees must have something very special in it (an X factor), as the damaged trees all had one parent tree species in common; furthermore, my theory was that all broadleaves had the same X factor in their phloem to a greater or lesser extent.

To cut a long story short, eventually, I was able to find someone to help and tests the phloem of the damaged tree

(Trochobel) and the undamaged tree (Robusta) at the Rothampsted Institute. The results blew my mind. There was ONE Amino Acid which was hundreds of time higher in the phloem in the Undamaged tree. I had got it the wrong way round. We were able to do the same phloem tests on a number of the standard UK broadleaves and I have been able to produce a table of the results below comparing it with 'damageability'.

There is a great deal more research to be done on this and Alex Ash at Southampton Uni under Prof. Patrick Doncaster is the clever bio-chemist do





that work.

Further evidence of my theory. Francis Fulford of Great Fulford in Devon contacted me to discuss the same sort of issues as the Poplar, on his Walnuts and sure enough, his American Walnut had a very low reading of the Amino Acid and the Common Walnut had a reading above 0.8 (which I think is the threshold). The Common Walnut was undamaged, but the faster 'Nigra' was badly damaged.

Further evidence / Observations were made during a recent ESI field meeting to the National Forest in 2025; we were

shown a stand of Silver Birch which had been hammered by grey sqs (DS 3 – 4, Frequency 8+), however on the edge of the stand and the wood (so you would think it would have high phloem) was a lone Birch tree – totally undamaged. It transpired that the tree was a Downy Birch. I must add that its phloem has not been tested, but I suspect that its reading will be above 0.8mg /m.

Photo above is of the poplars at research site near Sherborne, Bolare to the left, Gaver on the right and Columbia River in the centre – heavily damaged. A picture can often tell a thousand stories.

So how do the squirrels tell the difference between the tree species without testing the bark? We think (and I must stress that this really is a hypothesis), that the amino acid is linked to a chemical called 'cyazene', which is link to cyanide. We know that cyanide smells of almonds and we also know that some animal species (monkeys) can differentiate between tree species by the smell of almonds. Are the grey squirrels doing just this as they go through the tree canopy?

If they get a strong smell of almonds, they stay well clear of the tree; Perhaps.

Tree species Vs. damage susceptibility Ref. unpublished 2022

Tree Species	Chemical level Mg/ml	Damage ability scale 0-10
Poplar (Robus)	2.840	0
Wild Cherry	1.500	0
Small Leaf Lime		0-1
EU Walnut	.898	0-1
Alder	.800	2
Sweet Chestnut	.700	7
English Oak	.500	7*
Beech	.500	9
Sycamore	.310	10
US Walnut	.273	10
Field Maple		10
Poplar (Trichobel)	.268	10

Notes

- The 'English Oak' is based on Pedunculate Oak. There is a view that PURE Sessile oak (not the Dymock sessile oak) might be much safer than Pedunculate. Perhaps tests on the Oak at the Lovell Oak Collection & Arboretum in Cheshire, would be useful.
- Trichobel Poplar is in the same damage group as Sycamore, Field Maple and US Walnut.
- Therefore, there are broadleaf trees that can be planted which will NOT be damaged. Wild Cherry, Small leaf Lime, Italian Alder, Poplar i214, Robusta European Walnut, Eucalyptus for example and perhaps Downy Birch.



Money can grow on trees – but only with an ambitious approach

As the new Chair of the Forestry Commission (FC) takes up her role, the European Squirrel Initiative (ESI) is calling for urgent and coordinated action to control wild deer and grey squirrel populations, warning that without clear national policy, public investment in new woodland is being wasted.



Baroness Barbara Young

Baroness Barbara Young succeeds Sir William Worsley after six years as Chair of the FC, inheriting responsibility for delivering ambitious woodland creation and productivity targets at a time of growing concern across the forestry sector.

ESI Vice-chair Charles Dutton said that a lack of consistent control policy has resulted in newly planted trees being repeatedly damaged or destroyed by wild deer and grey squirrels.

“Taxpayers’ money is being wasted because trees that are planted with public funding are then left unprotected from predictable and preventable damage,” said Mr Dutton. “Without meaningful population control, planting targets alone will not deliver productive or resilient forests.”

ESI says this issue is particularly acute in lowland England, where much of the planned expansion of productive forestry is expected to take place and where public demand for broadleaf planting is highest.

“Planting broadleaves without effective deer and grey squirrel control is a false economy,” Mr Dutton said. “More of the same simply will not deliver the outcomes government, land managers or the public want.”

ESI supports existing grey squirrel control measures, including government funding through the Countryside Stewardship High Tier (CSHT) scheme, but says progress is being hampered by regulatory and operational constraints, including Forestry Commission guidance that limits effective, landscape-scale action.

Alongside improved coordination of current control measures, ESI says that new technologies should be explored responsibly. These include emerging genetic approaches, such as Gene Drive, which are still at a research stage but may, in the longer term, offer species-specific and self-limiting population control.

“We are not calling for the immediate deployment of new technologies,” said Mr Dutton. “But we do believe government should support research into innovative tools that could, with proper safeguards and regulation, play a role in future conservation management.

“In addition, we believe that Gene Drive could have far reaching conservation benefits for other species around the world and help Britain to be pioneers in ‘Conservation Control’, for example the RSPB might well be interested in this type of control on Gough Island in the south Atlantic.”

ESI has expressed its willingness to work constructively with Baroness Young and the Forestry Commission to restore confidence across the forestry supply chain — from nurseries and foresters to farmers considering woodland creation.

“What the sector needs now is confidence,” Mr Dutton said. “Confidence that policy will be consistent, that public money will be protected, and that woodland creation can genuinely contribute to productivity, biodiversity and climate goals.”



Public show strong support for new technology in grey squirrel control

A new nationwide survey commissioned by the European Squirrel Initiative (ESI) reveals strong public support for innovative approaches to managing grey squirrel populations, with a clear endorsement of emerging gene editing technologies as a humane, forward-looking solution.

Conducted in March 2026 by NEMS Market Research, the survey of 1,000 UK residents highlights widespread awareness of the threat posed by invasive grey squirrels to native red squirrels. Seven in ten respondents recognise that grey squirrels have driven significant declines in red

squirrel populations, while over 70% support active control measures to protect and restore the species.

Notably, public backing increases when non-lethal genetic approaches are introduced. Nearly four in five respondents (78.5%) support the use of gene editing techniques to manage grey squirrel populations, provided these methods enable the return of red squirrels to woodlands and parks.

“The findings suggest that the public is increasingly open to science-led conservation solutions that are both effective and humane. Support for gene editing spans all major demographic groups and regions, reflecting a broad national consensus

on the need for action.”, said Graham Taylor, Chairman of ESI.

“For ESI, the results represent a strong mandate to continue advancing research into gene editing as part of a wider conservation strategy. The organisation emphasises that any future implementation will be guided by rigorous science, regulatory oversight, and ongoing public engagement.”, added Mr Taylor.

“These findings mark a significant moment for UK conservation, demonstrating that the public not only understands the challenge but is ready to embrace innovative solutions to secure the future of native wildlife.”, he continued.

ESI Squirrel Survey Highlights:

70%

Yes: 69.96%
No: 24.85%
(Don't know): 5.19%

...aware that the grey squirrel is responsible for the decline to almost extinction of the native red squirrel.

52%

Yes: 52.44%
No: 42.64%
(Don't know): 4.92%

...aware that grey squirrels damage and destroy many thousands of young trees every year.

70%

Yes: 70.48%
No: 10.63%
(Don't know): 18.90%

...think the population of the alien grey squirrel should be controlled in some way in order to preserve from extinction and restore the red squirrel population.

79%

Yes: 78.50%
No: 6.74%
(Don't know): 14.77%

...support the use of non lethal genetic technology to control invasive species such as grey squirrels.



Guidelines need to be followed to avoid inadvertent red squirrel killings

Timber harvesting systems more sympathetic to red squirrels must be adopted

Concerns are being raised that the failure to adopt Forestry Commission guidelines for timber harvesting, in woodland supporting red squirrels, is having a devastating impact on populations of the highly protected species, particularly during the breeding season.

The European Squirrel Initiative (ESI) has queried whether guidance measures it helped to create and that were published over two years ago, are being followed rigorously in areas where red squirrel populations are present.

The ESI worked with the Forestry Commission and the UK Squirrel Accord, alongside other conservationists, over a period of some nine months to draw up new guidance, published by the Commission in March 2023, on how to plan and carry out forestry operations, so as to minimise impacts on red squirrels.

The guidelines advise that surveys should be conducted before any harvesting, to detect red squirrels and locate active dreys, and to avoid felling in red squirrel areas during the breeding season, with the period between February and September identified as when most disturbance is likely.

It also states that operatives should be trained and instructed to look for dreys and red squirrels during operations. If active dreys are found, work should be halted or moved to avoid those trees.

However, in Northumberland, an area very much in the front line of red squirrel conservation, concerns have been raised that timber harvesting operations had been taking place on a Forestry England site, when red squirrel kits were both active, and vulnerable.

The ESI fears that the young red squirrel kits in this area will have had little chance of survival from disturbance from



these harvesting operations.

"We at the ESI have spent a great deal of time researching and coming up with operational checklists and best practice to help improve timber harvesting in red squirrel areas," says ESI vice-chairman and chartered forester Charles Dutton.

"The red squirrels are a protected species, and it would be deeply concerning if it transpired that any state-run timber harvesting operations were not following their own guidelines," he adds.

Disturbance from timber harvesting operations is not only a localised issue for red squirrel populations. The issue is in fact a worldwide concern, with similar problems affecting koalas in Australia, and the Siberian flying squirrel in Finland, where Aspen trees are harvested.

Mr Dutton explains that much of his research in this area, and that of the ESI, has drawn on the work of the pioneering

ecologist Sir Frank Fraser-Darling. As an agricultural adviser in the Highlands and Islands in the 1950s and 1960s, he had worked to save the ground-nesting corncrake from decline, by adjusting and influencing changes to modern farming practices to help support the bird's nesting habitat.

For the red squirrel populations, Mr Dutton has advocated a similar change in mind-set with timber harvesting enterprises, and by following the Forestry Commission guidelines, it is possible to minimise the impact on red squirrels.

"It is crucial that these enterprises follow the guidelines set out by the Forestry Commission if we are to support red squirrel conservation in vital areas such as Northumberland, establishing harvesting systems that are more sympathetic to our red squirrel populations," he concludes.

What the Papers Say



DAILY EXPRESS



Red squirrel warning as species at risk after bumper crop

Grey squirrels are set for a population boom after the hot and dry summer produced a bumper crop of nuts and seeds.

Conservation charity the European Squirrel Initiative said 2025 is expected to be a “mast” year for certain species of trees, including oaks, beeches, hazels and chestnuts. This means there will be more winter food to support larger populations of grey squirrels, which are an invasive species and not native to the British Isles.

As a result, more cases of tree damage caused by the animals are

expected and the endangered native red squirrels, which are around 26% smaller than the invasive greys, will be pushed closer to the brink.

The Royal Forestry Society produced a report estimating that grey squirrel damage in England and Wales could cost at least £1.1 billion over the next 40 years.

Charles Dutton of the ESI said: “With an abundant supply of seeds and nuts, we can expect better grey squirrel survival rates through winter, and more resources for breeding, so inevitably populations will increase. When grey

squirrels increase in numbers, so we see more damage to trees, particularly by bark stripping.”

“That bark-stripping primarily occurs between April and October, at a point when we can expect these bumper populations to be active.”

The ESI hopes to cut the number of grey squirrels through humane and cost-effective solutions, such as spreading female infertility genes through the population.

*Author: Jaymi McCann
Express.co.uk
15 November 2025*

DAILY STAR SUNDAY



Squirrel fans on red alert

Britain is set to be overrun by grey squirrels, pushing red ones closer to the brink.

Conservation charity the European Squirrel Initiative (ESI) said the hot, dry summer had produced a bumper crop of nuts and seeds. It means the number of grey squirrels, which are not native to Britain, will soar. Endangered red squirrels, which are smaller than the grey invaders and struggle to

compete with them, will suffer. The ESI now hopes to limit the spread of grey squirrels through humane and cost-effective solutions, such as spreading female infertility genes.

The ESI's Charles Dutton said using gene editing could: “lead to a humane solution to the problem”.

*Daily Star on Sunday
16 November 2025*



Public Investment in Broadleaved trees 1991-2025

By Graham Taylor MBE FICFor



It is often said that planting trees is a waste of taxpayers' money if the result is what foresters describe as 'squirrel damaged junk'. Many seeking to establish a new woodland or restocking following felling do this work in good faith and with the best of intentions.

Much of this is supported through DEFRA and the Forestry Commission or the devolved national governments. This investment by the UK taxpayer recognizes the costs and benefits which flow from young broadleaved woodland for a whole host of natural capital benefits (water quality / improved air quality / carbon sequestration / habitat provision / amenity / social benefits / landscape) and in the longer- term, timber. All of this is done in hope & faith – it is an investment in the future.

However, despite repeated investment in well intentioned grey squirrel control measures, an owner can wake up with damage which ranges from mild to devastating after 10 -15 years of patient investment in nurturing these young trees.

After 35 years of doing battle with the grey pest, the author was asked by the Red Squirrel South West and the Royal Forestry Society to present at their Grey Squirrel summit in on the Perridge Estate, near Exeter. In the build up to

the event an attempt was made to work out the historic investment of UK taxpayers in broadleaved woodlands in England and Wales during a period spanning 1991-2025. A summary is presented below:

The below figures highlight just how much investment has been made,

	Broadleaved New Planting (ha)	Broadleaved Restocking (ha)	National Totals (ha)
Forestry England	2,350	14,930	
England – Private Woodlands	116,440	36,970	170,690
Natural Resources Wales (NRW)	160	11,630	
Wales – Private Woodlands	13,220	6,410	31,420
Forest & Land Scotland (FLS)	9,200	23,540	
Scotland – Private Woodlands	137,410	29,580	199,730
	278,780	123,060	401,840



mainly by private woodland owners with 267,070ha (95.7%) of total new planting and 72,960ha (59% of total restocking). Scotland has contributed nearly 50% of the increase in broadleaved woodland cover over the last 35 years. It is widely accepted that the majority of damage to young broadleaved trees occurs south of the border.

Historic and Current Grant Schemes

Grant systems have evolved over the last 35 years, starting with the Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS) mark 1,2,3 , then the England Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS). In England these have since been superceded by Countryside Stewardship funding and the England Woodand Creation Offer (EWCO). Each of these support mechanisms have provided a blend of hectare payments for woodland creation and a mechanism of annual

News



payments to assist with the costs of maintaining and fully establishing a new woodland over 10-15 years and up to 30 years in schemes from the early 1990's.

Desk based assessments on grant rates are fraught with complexity of rules applying over the last 35 years. However in a bid to establish an outline figure, average grant rates were used and average periods of annual payments which applied during each scheme.

The table (top right) represents a best attempt to provide a figure of UK taxpayer expenditure on supporting woodland establishment from 1991-2025.

A minimum total of over £976 million of UK taxpayer monies has been paid in support of woodland creation in England and Wales, supplemented by £209 million being spent on re-establishment of broadleaved woodland. These are large numbers and the investment is both welcome and necessary. The general consensus amongst private foresters and landowners, who represent the majority of where these trees have

New Broadleaved Woodland (England & Wales)

	Hectares	Establishment Grant (total)	Annual Payments (10-15 years)	Total
Forestry England	2,350	£12,803,500		
England - Private	116,440	£387,876,000	£480,265,500	£880,945,000
Wales - NRW	160	£979,000		
Wales – Private	13,220	£37,534,250	£56,902,500	£95,415,750
	132,170			£976,360,750

Broadleaved woodland Restocking – England and Wales (1991-2025)

	Hectares MB	Grant / Public Direct Cost	Total
Forestry England	14,930	£81,797,500	
England - Private	36,970	£55,295,200	£137,092,700
Wales - NRW	11,630	£63,855,000	
Wales – Private	6,410	£8,977,560	£72,832,560
	69,940		£209,925,260

been planted, is that circa 30% of a total area 129,660ha of new planting and 43,380ha of replanting in private forests has been dramatically affected by grey squirrel damage. The same is possibly true for the public forest estate.

These are not insubstantial figures – and begs the question; is this good value or should the UK taxpayer invest more in helping solving the perpetual grey squirrel crisis within broadleaved woodlands?

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Grey Squirrel on the Menu

Herb-crusted Squirrel Roast

Ingredients

For the squirrel and brine:

- 1 whole squirrel (about 2 lbs), cleaned and patted dry
- 4 cups cold water
- 1/4 cup kosher salt
- 2 tbsp brown sugar

For the herb crust:

- 1/2 cup fresh breadcrumbs
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley
- 2 tbsp chopped fresh rosemary
- 2 tbsp chopped fresh thyme
- 3 tbsp unsalted butter, melted
- 1 tsp freshly ground black pepper

For roasting:

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 cup low-sodium chicken broth



Instructions

1. In a large bowl, whisk together 4 cups cold water, 1/4 cup kosher salt, and 2 tbsp brown sugar until fully dissolved to create a brine.
2. Submerge the 1 whole squirrel completely in the brine, cover the bowl, and refrigerate for 1 hour to tenderize the meat and enhance flavor.
3. Preheat your oven to 375°F (190°C) and position a rack in the center.
4. Remove the squirrel from the brine, rinse it thoroughly under cold running water, and pat it completely dry with paper towels.
5. In a medium bowl, combine 1/2 cup fresh breadcrumbs, 1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley, 2 tbsp chopped fresh rosemary, 2 tbsp chopped fresh thyme, 3 tbsp melted unsalted butter, and 1 tsp freshly ground black pepper to form the herb crust mixture.
6. Tip: For the crispiest crust, ensure the squirrel skin is completely dry before applying the herb mixture.
7. Rub 2 tbsp olive oil evenly over the entire surface of the dried squirrel.
8. Press the herb crust mixture firmly onto all sides of the squirrel, creating an even, cohesive layer that adheres to the meat.
9. Place the crusted squirrel on a rack set inside a roasting pan, then pour 1 cup low-sodium chicken broth into the bottom of the pan (not over the squirrel).
10. Tip: The broth in the pan will create steam, keeping the meat moist while the crust browns.
11. Roast in the preheated 375°F oven for 60-75 minutes, or until the internal temperature reaches 165°F (74°C) when measured with a meat thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the thigh.
12. Tip: For extra browning, broil the roast for the final 2-3 minutes, watching carefully to prevent burning.
13. Remove the roasting pan from the oven and transfer the squirrel to a cutting board, letting it rest for 10 minutes before carving.