

ISSUE 38

DECEMBER 2020

SQUIRREL

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Published by the European Squirrel Initiative



“Gotcha!”



Dear Supporters

We will all remember 2020. It's been a year of, multiple and variable lockdowns, mass media hysteria and hugely disruptive economic turmoil across many industries. The forestry sector has not been immune to this, although with unusual and swift clarity from DEFRA, those involved in the wood supply chain were granted 'key worker' status, and much of the business of forestry has continued throughout. Whilst Covid-19 is clearly of greater national concern than grey squirrels, the impact of another 'alien' invader I think will help the cause of ESI in the public consciousness. Something arriving and being introduced from somewhere else in the world creating untold and unwelcome havoc in the process.

As far as 2020 goes with ESI's work, I think that we may well look back on this year as the year that the tide finally turned. The work that is beginning to happen with Roslin Research looking at the potential for gene drive to be used to alter the gender of a wild alien mammalian population, has potentially significant consequences for ESI's long established goal, but also greater potential applications for the control of alien invasive creatures in all natural environments globally.

Clearly the scientists need to work on producing a mechanism which is safe / effective / humane and something which passes through regulatory scrutiny of Government agencies.

All parties involved in this work will be equally keen for this necessary scrutiny. Interestingly the development of the Covid vaccine itself I believe has used genetic techniques to create the working product that the world is crying out for. When this knowledge becomes more widely known and accepted, the antipathy of a wide proportion of the population to all things involving gene editing may well diminish. This event also usefully coincides with a time when the political environment will allow Ministers to be bolder with exploring the potential scientific gains from new gene editing techniques having left the confines of the rather narrow European Union view



Graham Taylor

of it. Of course, if it becomes apparent that Covid was a creation of the laboratory, there will be a greater call for restriction on 'playing with genes'. Once discovered however a technology can often be used for good or for bad. The optimist in me supports the vision that the work we are embarking on with Roslin seems to offer the solution that we have been seeking over the last 20 years, a safe and humane way of controlling a widespread wild population of an alien invasive species.

With my best greetings
for the Season.

Graham Taylor MBE FICFor

Jigger Writes...

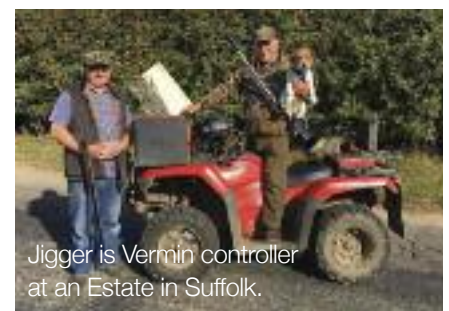
Keep at 'em

I am very lucky to have my job as a squirrel catcher on a large country estate in Suffolk which has award-winning woods where you can see more oak trees in one morning than you would see in years. Trees such as the wild service tree are one of the rarest trees in this country and probably more grow on the estate than in the whole of Britain.

That is where I and my partner in crime Steve come in; we run a trap line over 20 miles for seven days a

week. We can still slip up, because if we leave an outling wood quiet for a while, if cover and food is found, the squirrels will be in. We then have to trap heavily to get on top of them again, hoping they do not cause too much damage with their bark peeling antics than can kill the trees.

Squirrels are easy to catch compared to most vermin. All traps will catch squirrels, some more efficiently than others. I prefer the run-through tunnel traps and have caught more squirrels with this



Jigger is Vermin controller at an Estate in Suffolk.

particular type. If one is set at a fallen tree, you will soon have a squirrel in the bag. Whatever trap you choose, do not stop for a rest, for the squirrels never do...(keep at 'em!)

ESI Update - by Andrew Kendall, ESI

This is the 38th edition of Squirrel newsletter and it has been 12 months since publication of the last one. I hope it demonstrates ESI's range of activity, nevertheless the charity very much believes in sticking to its core principals of seeking ways to control grey squirrels.

In the last newsletter we referred to some early work on the use of gene editing to control grey squirrels. Scientists at the Roslin Institute, part of the University Edinburgh, have begun work in earnest and you will see more information on this elsewhere in this publication. Phase 1 is nearly completed, and results should be available soon. Early signs are very encouraging and every indication is that advance genetic technologies can now offer an innovative strategy that can be used to control the grey squirrel population. This is very exciting news and for the first time offers a real long term and cost-effective solution to the problem.

During the past 12 months, ESI has raised sufficient funds to conduct Phase 1 however more resources are needed to enable Phase 2 to begin and the charity will shortly be embarking on a major fund raising exercise, working closely with the University Edinburgh, to

raise sufficient funds. The programme of work entitled, DIGB: Directed Inheritance of Gender Bias distorts the sex ratio of a population, which is normally about 50/50 males to females. Gene drive will be established in the target animal which will selectively destroy X chromosomes leaving only Y chromosomes in order to generate male only offspring. Skewing the sex ratio within the target population will ultimately lead to a population crash due to the absence of female animals. Various safeguards will be built in to limit the number of generations the gene editing can be passed on.

Clearly it is relatively early days and many hurdles will have to be crossed not only fundraising but also regulatory. ESI is confident that at long last science will provide a real solution to the problem of the grey squirrel.

Turning to other activity, ESI has continued to comment issues of relevance through the media and



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

maintains a profile in the National, Regional, trade and specialist press. It has an active social media presence.

As a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, the Pine Marten Open Day planned for April 2020 had to be postponed and we are looking at ways of reorganising that as soon as possible.

Finally can I thank all those who have been supporters of ESI during this past year. Without your support and generosity none of the work we are involved with would have been able to go ahead. We have ambitious plans and appreciate your support.

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The Art of the Air Rifle by Russel Webb

This is the first time I have written for Squirrel and I would like to introduce myself. My interest in the countryside and wildlife was sparked by spending school holidays with an Uncle who worked as a game keeper on a sporting estate. I have spent the last thirty years shooting vermin with shotguns and firearms, but my main interest now is hunting grey squirrels with an air rifle.

As a member of a BASC Grey Squirrel Control Group expressed that shooting is a very inefficient method of grey squirrel control, I agree that the traditional walk and stalk methods used in the past delivered limited results. Winter drey poking can produce good results but is dependent on the weather and the enthusiasm of those carrying it out.

However the use of modern PCP air rifles with telescopic sights and bait stations is a very efficient method of control as the shooting takes place at a set distance at a static target. It maximises the hunters trigger time and can produce regular bags of grey squirrels.

What is a PCP air rifle and a bait station?

PCP Air Rifles

PCP air rifles have an air reservoir which holds enough air to power several dozen shots. Each time the gun is fired a valve or regulator releases a consistent pulse of air which blows the pellet down the barrel. The lack of significant moving parts means that the firing cycle is virtually recoilless. Many PCP air rifles incorporate multi shot magazines which can be useful to the hunter when a quick follow up shot is required.

When the air reservoir is empty it will need to be refilled and this is the biggest disadvantage with PCP air rifles. The cheapest refill method is to use a stirrup pump to manually generate the full charge of compressed air. The more convenient option is to use a large capacity diver's bottle as this will recharge most PCPs several dozen times before needing a refill. The disadvantages of using a divers bottle is that they cost several hundred pounds to buy and are heavy, unwieldy. PCP air rifles should only ever be filled



with clean air as attempting to use more volatile gases may damage the rifle and could result in a serious injury to the user.

Bait Stations

When controlling grey squirrels with a PCP air rifle the best tactic is to create a squirrel magnet by placing a bait station in an area frequented by grey squirrels. A bait station comprises a feeding hopper (which looks similar to a bird box with an opening at the bottom) that spills the feed into a small tray. A squirrel feeding on the bait presents a static target so the shooting is usually pretty straightforward. Bait stations are frequently referred to as "feeders" in the shooting community.

The bait station used by our grey squirrel control group was purchased from Squirrel Management UK. The SMUK bait station is able to resist the worst of the grey squirrels gnawing as it is covered with wire mesh and uses a metal feed tray. Our experience has shown that squirrels are attracted to peanuts even when natural food is

abundant. A simple hide consisting of a few hide poles and a camouflage net placed around 20 meters from the bait station provides sufficient cover. I wear an army surplus camouflage jacket in the hide as it does a good job blurring my outline and use a pair of gloves and a face veil to ensure that every piece of my pink flesh is concealed.

Equipment List

The equipment I use when shooting grey squirrels at a bait station:

- **Air Arms S410 air rifle in 177 calibre.**
- **MTC Mamba Lite 3x12x44 telescopic sight.**
- **Air Arms Diablo Field pellets.**
- **Primos shooting sticks.**
- **Jack Pyke hide poles and camouflage net.**
- **Jack Pyke face veil.**
- **Macwet shooting gloves.**

I wear an army surplus camouflage jacket and hat purchased from Ebay. The peanuts used in the feeder are the 12.5kg bags sold in B&M stores.

Bede Howell OBE 1935-2020

When you start your career as a young forester you begin to piece together a 'who's who' of people in the forestry sector. You attend conferences, field meetings and over a period of time a picture emerges of how the sector works, and who are the leaders in their field. I first became aware of Bede Howell as senior partner at Abbey Forestry, based in Pershore in the early 1990's. At RFS & CLA meetings Bede would provide authoritative commentary on the matters of visit, always with good grace and wit. He would politely and respectfully question the Forestry Commissions stance in matters of silviculture, forestry policy and practice. He would recount humorous tales of the woodsmen from the post war era who helped re-establish our woodland cover after the turmoil of the extensive wartime fellings. Restoring derelict scrub back to productive and useful woodland and doing battle with weeds, brambles with a combination of mechanical devices, the Allen scythe, weeding hooks and doses of 2,4,5-T. Interspersed through the visits too he would often remind the attendees of lessons from ancient history, poetry or the Bible about what or what not to do in human endeavour.

A graduate of Aberdeen University, Bede was a well-read man, thoroughly knowledgeable in the arts, sciences and languages, all of which showed his active and quick mind which fundamentally desired to understand humanity and how things work. During his time in National Service he was a leader of units, during his time in forestry he led his firm from the front and became a leader in the forestry industry, in turn he was widely respected across and beyond the industry.

Having established many areas of new and restocked woodland from the late 1950's, like others he became



singularly focussed on dealing with and becoming a passionate advocate about the necessity of control of the Grey squirrel. He was a key founder of the '12th June' grouping which founded ESI in 2020. He knew the importance of ESI's work and that it might be a 50-year project to see the eradication of the grey pest from our island. He was heavily involved in ESI for almost 20 years, serving on the management committee, presenting to landowners and at every forestry and landowner meeting, he would raise the 'don't forget about the squirrel' comment without fail. He became the specialist expert advising the National Forest on their 'big problem' of how to get the thousands of hectares through the GS damage phase of a stand's life.

Bede was also actively involved with the Royal Forestry Society, becoming president in 1997, and spent over two decades being involved with oak tree breeding with Future Trees Trust. I will treasure one very special visit that 10 foresters and landowners undertook in November 2015 to study French oak forests near Orleans. A year or two

earlier, Bede had translated a new French text 'the Chene Autrement' supported by Woodland Heritage & Future Trees Trust and the authors had agreed to host a visit of a dozen foresters intent on seeing the forests which had inspired the book. Four of us shared a car journey of 10 hours each way, the discussion continued throughout about forestry, life and oak, with Bede holding forth for much of the time.

There was only one Bede Howell, truly enigmatic amongst his peers and he is being much missed by his family, friend's and colleagues. My last encounter with Bede was last year, he was becoming frailer and slow to move around the house needing the help of Elizabeth his ever kind and ever supporting wife. Bede was also a man of deep faith, and whilst frail, he was both happy and sure of what lay ahead. He knew that he was in the hands of his great Maker and was in great peace about it all.

Graham Taylor MBE FICFor
25th November 2020



DIGB: Directed Inheritance of Gender Bias

A genetic strategy to:

- achieve optimal *Sciurus* biodiversity through grey squirrel population control, and;
- limit Squirrel Pox Virus progression, potentially offering the long-term controlled eradication of this devastating disease from the Red Squirrel.

Application

- Gene Drive: An advanced genetic technology to offer an innovative strategy to control the grey Squirrel population

Development Status

- Three phase R&D programme □ Active Phase 1: Design, model and in vitro validation of grey squirrel gene drive strategies
- Phase 2: Production of Gene Drive in Grey Squirrels
- Phase 3: Field Testing of Grey Squirrel Gene Drive

Commercial Offering

- Seeking investment support for Phase 2 & Phase 3 development
- Potential to invest in a new start-up focused on conservation of native indigenous wildlife by offering an alternative control of foreign/invasive pest species



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Context

The grey Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) is native to North America and has been introduced into Europe. In contrast, the red Squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*) is common throughout Eurasia. In the UK the numbers of red Squirrel have drastically decreased since the grey Squirrel was introduced with the grey Squirrel regarded as an invasive species. The grey Squirrel is both more aggressive than the red Squirrel and is a carrier of Squirrel Pox which is lethal to the red Squirrel. It has been predicted that without effective conservation measures, the red Squirrel could be lost from the UK by 2030.

Opportunity

The Roslin Institute are currently developing Gene Drive strategies for potential application in mammalian pests and invasive species; in dialogue with the European Squirrel Initiative this effort now focusses on controlling grey squirrel populations. The basic concept has been demonstrated in laboratory mouse populations; as the academic community develops knowledge of gene drives in mammalian systems, the need for further mouse data is clearly required as a quick route to proof-of-principle. We now want to apply the technology to control squirrel populations.

Technology Overview: Gene Drive – An Innovative Genetic Solution

Advanced genetic technologies now offer an innovative strategy – called gene drive – to control the grey Squirrel population. As each species has a unique genome (their DNA) these reagents can be tailored to work only on the target species. Thus, reagents can be designed to only 'edit' the grey and not the red Squirrel (or vice versa). There is considerable current activity developing gene drive strategies to

control mosquito populations and mitigate transmission of disease by these insects.

Animals have about 20,000 genes in their genome. In all but germ cells (sperm and eggs) animals carry two copies of each gene (geneticists call these copies "alleles") in each of the cells that make up the animal: they inherit one copy from their father and one copy from their mother. Since both the father and mother have two copies themselves, there is a 50% chance of inheriting a given copy from a given parent. Therefore, if one parent has a 'desirable' copy and the other has no desirable copies, then only 25% of offspring will carry the desirable copy (50% of 50%).

In gene drives, the single desirable copy (the introduced transgene) is driven through a population such that all offspring carry it. That animal will pass the transgene to all of their offspring and so on.

Benefits

- Gene drive technology can be used to distort the sex ratio of a population – which is normally about 50:50 females to males.
- In this scenario, a gene drive is established in the target animal (i.e. grey squirrel) that causes female sterility; for example, through the use of an 'X-shredder' that selectively destroys X chromosomes during sperm production, leaving only Y chromosome bearing sperm to generate male-only offspring.
- Over time this will lead to a preponderance of males (the opposite effect can also be achieved; male sterility leading to a preponderance of females);
- This skewing of sex ratio within the target population will ultimately lead

to a population crash due to the absence of female animals.

- The technology incorporates built-in stop mechanisms and self-limiting systems that enable targeted, localised spread; preventing impact on non-targeted animal populations.

Scientific Leads

Prof Bruce Whitelaw, Genus Chair of Animal Biotechnology, Interim Director of The Roslin Institute; Chairman Roslin Innovation Centre, Easter Bush Campus, University of Edinburgh.

Mr Gus McFarlane, PhD Student investigating novel CRISPR-based gene drive strategies to control invasive vertebrate pests, The Roslin Institute, University of Edinburgh.

Publications

McFarlane, G., Whitelaw, B. & Lillico, S. (2018). *CRISPR-Based Gene Drives for Pest Control. Trends Biotechnology*, 36(2), 130-133.
Whitelaw, B. & McFarlane, G. (2019). *Accelerating evolution. The Biologist (Royal Society of Biology)*, 66(6), 18-21.
Grunwald, H. et al. (2019). *Super-Mendelian inheritance mediated by CRISPR-Cas9 in the female mouse germline. Nature*, 566(7742), 105-109.

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DIGB, an update on phase one

Direct Inheritance of Gender Bias (DIGB) technology is a novel strategy for managing invasive grey squirrel in the UK. The technology is being developed and evaluated through an ESI funded project lead by Prof Bruce Whitelaw and Gus McFarlane of the Roslin Institute. This genetic management tool builds on the scientific understanding of naturally occurring selfish genetic elements that bias their own inheritance and therefore spread themselves through a population. For managing grey squirrel, DIGB could be used to spread a female infertility gene through the targeted population. Overtime, this would lead to a humane, species-specific and cost-effective population decline owing to the lack of fertile female squirrels available as breeding partners.

The DIGB research project at the Roslin Institute includes both computational and laboratory-based research. Computational population modelling plays a critical role in evaluating both the effectiveness and safety of DIGB strategies. Working with ESI's Scientific Advisor, Dr Craig Shuttleworth, population modellers Dr Gregor Gorjanc and Nicky Faber developed a squirrel prediction model that took into account both population and reproduction parameters, such as litter size and generation interval, as well as spatial parameters, including maximum population density and mating range. This population model was then used to evaluate several DIGB strategies in silico that were designed based on the recently sequenced grey squirrel genome.

Outputs from the modelling work has provided promising results. The study demonstrated that DIGB could theoretically suppress grey squirrel populations by over 60% within 10 years and lead to complete remove of the pest within 20 years. The most suitable of the DIGB strategies modelled was able to control the rate and extent of grey squirrel decline based on the number and location of the DIGB squirrels deployed. We predict that further studies with this modelling tool may identify alternative time dependent strategies. Importantly, the team's modelling has verified that the spatial life history of the grey squirrel is highly susceptible DIGB technology.

Although the population modelling component of this project progressed throughout the COVID-19 pandemic,

laboratory-based research was forced to pause and only recently regained traction. The research team is now testing high-performing DIGB strategies identified in the modelling work in a grey squirrel cell line they established prior to lockdown. This is the first reported grey squirrel cell line and will fast track preliminary testing and validation of DIGB strategies. Early outputs from the laboratory work has demonstrated the team's ability to introduce DIGB tools into squirrel cells and subsequently edit the squirrel genome at desired target genes – a prerequisite for developing the technology. Work in the laboratory is now progressing to functionally validate DIGB reagents in the squirrel cells.

These encouraging results from both the computational modelling and laboratory research builds an excellent foundation for further development of the technology; including expanding the scope of the modelling work to incorporate ecological risk assessment,



and contained and safeguarded testing of DIGB in animal trials. Prof Whitelaw said, "We believe DIGB holds great promise for managing damaging invasive species, such as the grey squirrel. This is an exciting time for the technology and these results stimulate our eagerness to develop, test and evaluate this technology."

Further details on the population modelling of DIGB can be found in a preprint academic article at: shorturl.at/dAOQT

Project DIGB: Phase 1 deliverables

- D1 Design grey Squirrel specific Gene Drive strategies
 - a. Identified target genes in squirrel genome
 - b. Designed squirrel drives (Daisy-field, Daisy-Chain and HD-ClvR)
- D2 Grey Squirrel Gene Drive reagents
 - a. 95% of reagents developed (cell line, CRISPR tools, PCRs e.t.c)
 - b. Finalise the development of gene drive DNA construct (up to four weeks)
- D3 In vitro validation of Grey Squirrel Gene Drive reagents
 - a. CRISPR reagents have been validated in vitro
 - b. CRISPR integration of DNA into squirrel genome in cells (up to six weeks)
- D4 Modelling data for deployment of Gene Drive within grey Squirrel populations
 - a. Modelling and data analysis completed
 - b. Publication under review

■ = not yet completed (16/11/20)



Government tree planting target worthless without grey squirrel control

The Government's target to plant 20 million broadleaf trees in lowland Britain not only underestimates its budget pledge, but will also be worthless without proper control of grey squirrels, woodland experts warn.

In his March budget, Chancellor Rishi Sunak pledged that 30,000 hectares of trees would be planted within the next five years, but leading conservationists and foresters are calling for a longer term and more sustained approach to make a difference.

While it has welcomed the Government scheme, The European Squirrel Initiative (ESI) is urging for a far more progressive tree planting project to make a worthwhile difference to the broadleaved woodland sector.

It also warns of the dangers of irreparable damage to broadleaf trees caused by grey squirrels, citing the failures of previous grant aided tree planting exercises to address this problem.

"20 million trees may sound a very impressive figure, but in reality, that

equates to just 12,500 hectares," explained chartered forester, and ESI trustee Charles Dutton. "Government should be looking at 200 million trees over the next 20 years."

Mr Dutton states that it could need 48 million trees to cover 30,000 hectares, but warns that even this number will be worthless and come to nothing other than scrub, without proper control of grey squirrels.

"The Government need only look to the results of the grant aided tree-planting of 1988-90, to replace the mighty oaks following the 1987 storms. Poor grey squirrel control has resulted in irreparable damage, leaving the trees planted mostly destroyed and those areas replaced with scrub woodland," he added.

With grey squirrel numbers set to increase this spring following a mild winter, this will have significant implications for the forester and seriously undermine the government's target.

Figures released last year show that grey squirrels cost the UK economy around £40 million every year. As well as



Grey Squirrel damage

damaging trees, parks and gardens and preying on woodland birds, grey squirrels have driven native red squirrels to the verge of extinction, both through competition and as carriers of the squirrel-pox virus to which greys are immune.

Mr Dutton added, "Given the current situation and economic implications of the coronavirus pandemic, it is imperative that trees planted with grant aid can actually be allowed to grow."

The ESI is calling for increased culling programmes to control the growing grey squirrel populations aided by the mild-winter, and has called on forest managers to intensify controls now.

SQUIRREL

This is the 38th edition of The Squirrel, and here at ESI we are constantly looking at ways to improve our communication with our readers and supporters. In order to help improve communication with you all we will be producing an e-newsletter in addition to the printed magazine that you already enjoy.

This will also allow us to communicate with our readers more regularly.

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ESI welcomes updates on controlling grey squirrels, but where is the other half?



Grey Squirrel damage

The European Squirrel Initiative (ESI) has welcomed the latest updates on controlling grey squirrels, but fears two key areas are not being addressed at an opportune time to co-ordinate activities in both limiting woodland damage and supporting red squirrel conservation.

The latest updates and advice have

been delivered by Forest Research. It follows figures released last year by ESI showing that grey squirrels cost the UK economy around £40 million every year.

As well as damaging trees, parks and gardens and predating on woodland birds, grey squirrels have driven our native red squirrels to the verge of extinction, both through competition and as carriers of the squirrel-pox virus to which greys are immune.

“There is a lot of excellent content in the updated guidance notes, with detailed new advice from Forest Research touching on most aspects of grey squirrel control, which is very much welcomed,” said Charles Dutton, ESI trustee. “However, this has been long overdue, and it is disappointing that two key aspects have been omitted.”

Mr Dutton added, “There is a great deal of peer reviewed literature about ‘damage prediction’, and this would be most helpful to the forester and woodland managers. Access to this information would enable identification of the early signs of damage, and to

undertake major control before massive economic damage occurs.”

ESI would also like to have seen an update to the ‘Red Squirrel Conservation’ paper, and believes this could have been combined into one comprehensive guidance document.

“Whilst ESI has concentrated on trying to remove grey squirrels and their impacts on reds, the management of the woodland habitat needs to be updated,” said Mr Dutton.

“There has been so much research on red squirrel habitats since the original document was first published, in 1978. The ESI feels this would have been an ideal opportunity to produce one overarching document, encompassing damage prediction advice and red squirrel conservation research, alongside the other updates.

“We do very much welcome the updates, it is a positive step forward, but the ESI would urge Forest Research to update the Red Squirrel Conservation document as soon as possible,” concluded Mr Dutton.

Daily Mail

Squirrelgate!

Lord Blunkett's guide dog is accused of killing protected rodents in London's Green Park as he admits: 'Barley loves chasing tree rats'

Lord Blunkett has become embroiled in a heated row over claims that his beloved guide dog is a squirrel killer.

Devastated park goers have complained to police and park management after allegedly witnessing Barley, the former Home Secretary's guide dog kill two squirrels while being taken for a walk.

The incidents reportedly took place in Green Park, central London in September and October while Lord

Blunkett and an aide let Barley off the leash to stretch his legs.

According to an eyewitness, who filmed and photographed Barley running through the park, his alleged victims were a baby squirrel and an older, ‘junior’ squirrel.

But one complainant denied that she had anything against Lord Blunkett, insisting she was only motivated by a love of animals.

She protested: ‘I’m a vegetarian but



I’m not a radical activist. I cook meat for my boyfriend and don’t want to impose my views on other people.

‘But Lord Blunkett should know better when he is out in the park with his dog. I don’t understand why he allows him to get away with this kind of behaviour.’

Roast squirrel with squash, sage & hazelnuts

This is such a simple and delicious way to cook squirrel. The meat is surprisingly tender and responds so well to the high heat of the oven. The pumpkin, sage and nuts are perfect with the squirrel, making this an ultimate autumn dish. This recipe also works really well with rabbit, pheasant or even chicken.

Prep Time: 10 minutes **Cook time:** 1 hour **Serves:** 2 People (as a starter)



Ingredients

2 thick slices of butternut squash
(about 250g)
1 oven-ready squirrel
(about 250g, jointed on the bone),
1 garlic bulb, halved around its circumference
1 handful of sage leaves
2 bay leaves
2 tablespoons whole hazelnuts
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. Heat the oven to 190°C/375°F/gas mark 5. Place the squash slices in a medium roasting tray and arrange the squirrel (or pheasant, chicken or rabbit) pieces around it. Nestle in the two halves of the garlic bulb, then sage leaves and bay leaves, and then scatter over the hazelnuts.
2. Drizzle over the olive oil and season everything well with salt and pepper.
3. Place the tray in the oven and roast for 45–60 minutes, turning the squirrel pieces once during this time, until the squash is cooked and the squirrel is tender. Remove the tray from the oven and allow the meat to rest for 4–5 minutes.
4. Divide the squirrel meat and squash evenly between two plates, along with a few cloves of the tender, roasted garlic. Serve straight away. (Or bring the roasting tin to the table and eat it straight from the tin.)

This recipe was originally published in Gather by Gill Meller. Photography: Andrew Montgomery

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