

Forestry Commission Challenged by Leading Conservation Charity.

The European Squirrel Initiative (ESI) is taking the Forestry Commission (FC) to task on its grey-squirrel control policy, which does not allow the use of air guns to remove this invasive, non-native species. In its current newsletter, ESI asserts that the FC England's decision jeopardises efforts to protect woodland from damage by the grey squirrel, and to save the beleaguered red squirrel.

“Shooting with air guns is an important part of the armoury in controlling grey squirrel numbers,” says ESI Chairman, Andy Wiseman, who has over thirty years’ experience in the forestry sector. “The Forestry Commission’s decision simply doesn’t make sense. All other NGOs (non-government organisations) involved in the removal of grey squirrels in the area allow the use of air guns and we have clear evidence that, used in conjunction with trapping, they are an efficient and safe way of quickly reducing grey squirrel numbers,” Mr Wiseman explains.



The article is part of a campaign being mounted by ESI to get the Forestry Commission to reverse its decision, and to allow two pilot projects to control grey squirrel populations in locations in the north of England.

“We’re not talking about members of the public going about shooting grey squirrels,” Mr Wiseman explains, “but authorised volunteers and contractors, who are highly experienced, trained and insured. By banning the use of air guns, the FC is undermining the landscape-scale approach necessary to control the spread of grey squirrels, an approach which has overwhelming public support. We need to persuade this one, risk-averse organisation to change its policy and get in step with the efforts of hundreds of volunteers to remove this pest which has had such a devastating impact on the native red squirrel,” Mr Wiseman concludes.

Is Grey-squirrel Control Being Jeopardised by the Forestry Commission?

The Forestry Commission has banned the use of air guns to remove grey squirrels in its forests and woods. ESI is mounting a strong campaign at a national level against this stance, which is complete out of step with the evidence.

It is difficult to understand why the Forestry Commission, which has always been a leader in the control of grey squirrels, has now decided to ban the use of air guns. The Forestry Commission not only continues to own, but also the majority of the equipment and organisations to control forests and woodlands, and the policy is contrary to the evidence. The Forestry Commission is also in a position to support the use of air guns in its forests and woods. ESI is mounting a strong campaign at a national level against this stance, which is complete out of step with the evidence.

Higher density of red squirrels than grey squirrels in during the season when trapping is used. Northern Forest Squirrels (NFS) volunteers and red squirrels are being trapped from forests to be released in other areas. The Forestry Commission is not only continuing to own, but also the majority of the equipment and organisations to control forests and woodlands, and the policy is contrary to the evidence. The Forestry Commission is also in a position to support the use of air guns in its forests and woods. ESI is mounting a strong campaign at a national level against this stance, which is complete out of step with the evidence.

Notes for Editors

High-resolution images are available to accompany this release.





The European Squirrel Initiative:

The grey squirrel, *Sciurus carolinensis*, a native species of North America, was introduced to England from the late 19th century, until 1938 when it became illegal to import or keep the species in captivity.

The European Squirrel Initiative was founded in June 2002 by a group of concerned conservationists and foresters. The organisation seeks the restoration of the native red squirrel and the protection of the natural environment by removing the impact of the alien grey squirrel in Europe.

Its role is to:

- Persuade conservation bodies and governments of the absolute necessity of ridding Europe of the grey squirrel.
- Continue to commission research into the impact of the grey squirrel on local ecosystems.

For more information visit the ESI website: www.europeansquirrelinitiative.org

Issued by Kendalls on behalf of the European Squirrel Initiative.

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