

Grey Squirrels and the threat to Europe

The European Squirrel Initiative is a registered UK charity, established in 2002. The aim of the charity is to safeguard the native European red squirrel and protect the natural environment by the removal of the alien American grey squirrel from Europe.

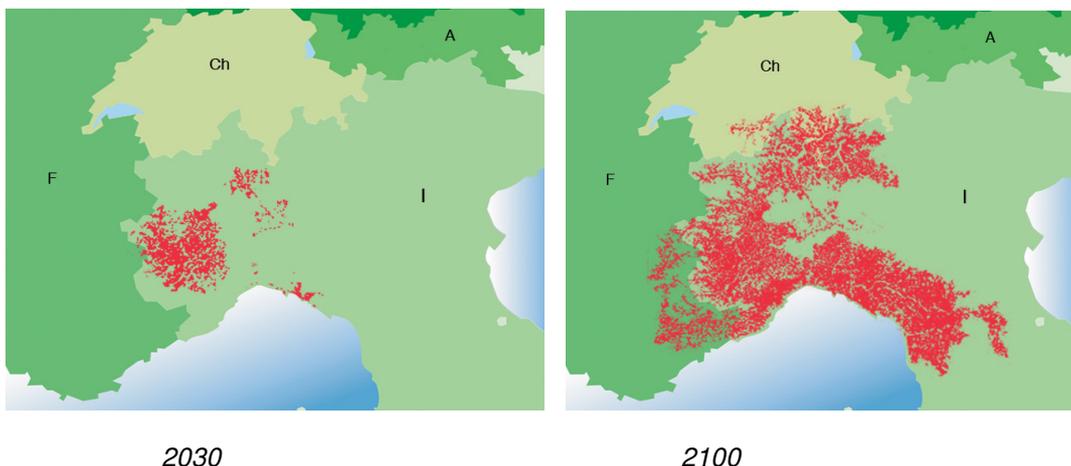
The American grey squirrel poses one of the greatest threats to European forests and biodiversity. The grey squirrel causes severe economic damage to forests and woodland and has a major impact on both flora and fauna. Particularly, it determines the extinction of the red squirrel through food competition and acting as a vector of a virus that is lethal to the reds.

The charity works to create, develop and maintain a campaign to win the support and commitment of governments throughout Europe in securing the future of the red squirrel through the effective control of the grey squirrel.

The situation in Italy

Italy's grey squirrels are located in Piemonte near Turin, the Ticino Valley in Lombardia and neighbouring areas and at Genoa Nervi. According to some modeling scenarios, there will be a fast expansion of grey squirrels: the eastern part of the Liguria will be colonised within the next 35-40 years and in 50-60 years the colonisation of the Apennines between Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany will start. In 20 years this expansion will also extend into Switzerland and in 40-60 years to France.

The Piemonte region will be completely colonised as well as Liguria, parts of the Aosta Valley, the western part of Lombardy and the northern part of the Apennines. The total population size at the end of 100 years could reach **4-6 million** animals.



Predicted grey squirrel populations in Europe

- Grey squirrels will displace the indigenous red squirrel population in Italy.
- Grey squirrels predate the nests of woodland birds, taking both eggs and fledglings.

The spread of the grey squirrel in northern Italy will have serious implications for red squirrel conservation throughout Europe. Political concern about the lack of action in Italy has been expressed by the Permanent Commission of the Bern Convention, who have produced a specific recommendation (Dec 2005) urging the authorities of the Ticino Valley to eradicate grey squirrels.

In 2011 funding was granted under the LIFE+ EC-SQUARE Project to undertake monitoring and control activities in Italy and to develop an efficient public-relations campaign essential to obtain a wide consensus of the civic society

The future spread of the grey squirrel into France, Switzerland and eventually other neighbouring countries would pose a significant future problem for commercial forestry, biodiversity and a threat to native wildlife such as the European red squirrel.

It is vital that pressure is maintained on the Italian authorities to eradicate the grey squirrel population in Italy before it crosses the border into France, Switzerland and other European countries.

Useful Links

The conservation of the European red squirrel - www.life-ecsquare.eu

Delivering Alien Invasive Species Inventories for Europe (DASIE) - www.europe-aliens.org

European Squirrel Initiative – www.europeansquirrelinitiative.org

The Bern Convention - www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/nature/bern