

## 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. Greys damage trees by removing bark from the root spurs, trunk and smaller branches of trees from as young as six, to as old as 125 years, with sycamore, beech and oak as the major species attacked, though most broadleaved trees, as well as pine, larch and Norway spruce can suffer also.

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 threat to Germany

The colony of grey squirrels in the Ticino Valley in Lombardia will, unless controlled, spread into Switzerland within the next 10 – 20 years. Once established in the Switzerland greys will be free to spread into Germany and into central and eastern European countries.

It is vital that that this is not allowed to happen as it will have a devastating impact on commercial forestry, biodiversity and native wildlife.



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(OSF)

Note the bark strippings at the tree base (left and right).

- Grey squirrels will cause tens of millions of Euros of damage each year to German forests.
- Grey squirrels will displace the indigenous red squirrel population in Germany.
- Grey squirrels predate the nests of woodland birds, taking both eggs and fledglings.

## **The situation in Italy**

Italy's grey squirrels are located in Piemonte near Turin, the Ticino Valley in Lombardia and at Genoa Nervi. Grey squirrel numbers are expanding rapidly: 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 (grey squirrels have already been sighted at Pinerollo and within a few km of the Swiss border).

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 **6 million** animals.

The spread of the grey squirrel in northern Italy will have serious implication 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.

**It is vital that Germany persuades 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](http://www.life-ecsquare.eu)

**Delivering Alien Invasive Species Inventories for Europe (DASIE)** - [www.europe-aliens.org](http://www.europe-aliens.org)

**German forest owner association** - [www.agdw.org](http://www.agdw.org)

**European Squirrel Initiative** – [www.europeansquirrelinitiative.org](http://www.europeansquirrelinitiative.org)

**The Bern Convention** - [www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/nature/bern](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/nature/bern)