

Grey Squirrels and the threat to Europe

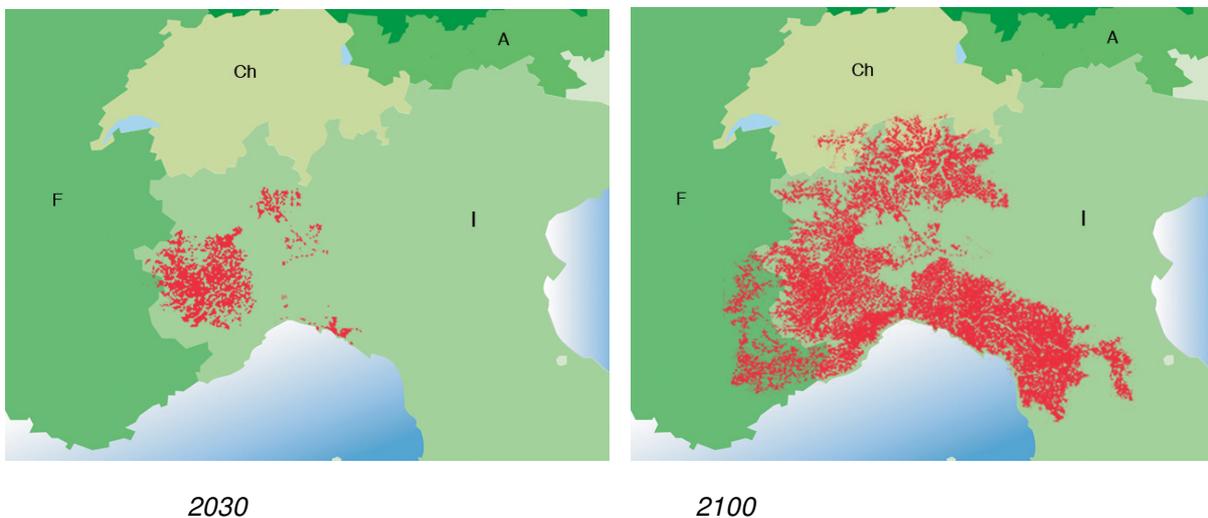
The European Squirrel Initiative is a registered UK charity, established in 2002. The aim of the charity is to safeguard the native European red squirrel and protect the natural environment by the removal of the alien American grey squirrel from Europe.

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 France

The Turin colony in Italy is estimated to number around in excess of 10,000 animals and, according to a survey produced in 2006 by the University of Turin, grey squirrels could cross the border into South East France in about 2030. By the end of the century they will have a significant foothold in France and once over the Alps, will spread rapidly through France.



Predicted grey squirrel populations in Europe

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

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

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 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.

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.

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

National Forestry Office, France - www.onf.fr

European Squirrel Initiative – www.europeansquirrelinitiative.org

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