

Press Release

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GREY SQUIRREL NUMBERS TO INCREASE

Grey squirrel numbers are set to increase this spring following a mild winter and an abundant supply of food available last autumn. Consistent growing conditions created large volumes of seeds late last summer and autumn, according to woodland experts.

“The squirrel population is likely to be the highest we have seen for some time,” said Graham Taylor, specialist woodland manager at Pryor & Rickett Silviculture. “Whilst last year’s mast season was modest, there were many late broods in 2015 and high overwintering survival rates due to mild conditions will lead to further population increases. Combine this with lower mast stores and this points to a high damage propensity with higher control levels being necessary to avoid it,” he added.

Grey squirrels cost the UK economy around £14 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.

“This is worrying news” said Andy Wiseman, Chairman of the European Squirrel Initiative. “There has been a notable increase in grey squirrel populations and culling programmes will have to be increased. Historically, it is in years such as this that grey squirrel damage to vulnerable trees becomes apparent by the following summer. Wise forest managers should act accordingly and increase controls.”



Sycamore debarked. Photo by Bede Howell



Earl grey squirrel damage. Photo by Bede Howell

Ends



Notes to Editors:

High resolution photos are available to accompany this release.

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The European Squirrel Initiative:

The grey squirrel, *Sciurus caroliensis*, 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 on behalf of the European Squirrel Initiative by Kendalls.

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