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SQUIRREL

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Quietly Does It
The Art of Drey Shooting



Dear Supporters

We enter 2024 with a quiet optimism of making more strides on the journey towards a Grey Squirrel free future. For those of you who continue to battle with the grey pest and sense that it is a never ending futile wrestle, I would urge you to think about the impact of stopping the fight. More of your precious broadleaves will become damaged in the coming growing seasons, more song birds will fail to thrive and your woods and forests will fail to thrive. Grey squirrel control is vital for the future of our trees and wider biodiversity.

So, what are causes for New Year optimism you might ask? Well, there are quite a few:

- UK Squirrel Accord is getting closer to being able to launch Immuno-contraception to the market. The team at APHA have successfully proved that the product works in Grey squirrels and they are on the next stages of bait station development and working towards field trials in the next couple of years.
- ESI continues to work with Roslin Institute where there is a current position for a Post Doctoral researcher to work fully on Gene drive in Grey squirrels. Further lobbying with Forestry Ministers and DEFRA officials has been taking place and will continue into 2024.
- DEFRA and FC have increased funding for private woodland owners to increase and undertake grey squirrel control, with an emphasis on landscape scale control alongside working in coordination with neighbours to achieve that control.
- The Forestry Minister is due imminently to launch the latest Squirrel Action plan.
- Various very well designed new traps are planned to come to market this year which should help achieve better and more effective control across the



Graham Taylor

country.

In the whole of my 34 year long career in forestry, there is more DEFRA support, more interest, more political profile and an urgency to this work than there has ever been. All of this is gratifying, but we know that we need to carry on and keep pushing towards a Grey squirrel free future.

ESI will keep up the impetus in 2024, and we look forward to your continued support through the coming year.

With my best and sincere regards
Graham Taylor MBE FICFor

Jigger Writes...

The Squirrel Hoard

Catching squirrels is quite easy compared to some other vermin like rats that are more wary and don't like change, squirrels scamper all over the place and are quite inquisitive. This year they came in as usual after the breeding season, that mainly happens twice a year; they came in their hundreds, more than usual. My partner Paul and I had to move quick to find all the traps we had and getting them set. I think now we are getting on top of them, if not stopped it would be devastating for the woodlands. All the catch goes to the game dealer.

"Plenty of squirrel pie".



ESI Update - by Andrew Kendall, ESI

As we enter 2024, we can look back on a year where ESI sharpened its focus by concentrating on gene-editing. There is no doubt that this will provide the solution that ESI have been looking at for the last 22 years.

The eradication of the grey squirrel can only be achieved through the adoption of this technology and work being carried out at Roslin under the supervision of Professor Bruce Whitelaw will be our saviour.

This work will, of course, have the valued spin off in that will be able to be applied to other invasive species which cause significant damage both economically and environmentally throughout the world. We can therefore be satisfied that our work will have a positive impact on biodiversity. In order to achieve our goal, we need support from government, politicians and civil servants. Over the past 12 months ESI has spent a considerable amount of time working with these, helping to educate them and explain to them the damage caused by the grey squirrel and the benefits of adopting gene-editing as a solution.

Visits have been organised for politicians to see the damage caused and to explain how gene-editing works and how it can be safely and effectively

applied to grey squirrels. Progress is being made and we owe a huge amount of gratitude to Professor Whitelaw and his team at Roslin as well as to individual landowners and supporters who help us in many ways throughout the year. Their enthusiasm is undimmed and helps to maintain pressure on the decision makers.

In this edition you will see an article written by Richard Coke advocating and explaining the benefits of gene-drive as the only solution and a response in support of this by one of ESI's trustees, Charles Dutton. The work continues a pace and it's gratifying to see that many conservation-based organisations are falling in line behind ESI's lead in supporting the use of gene-drive as a solution to the wider problem of invasive alien species.

While our focus has been single mindedly on this issue, ESI continues to support more conventional and current matters of control and again in this edition you will see an article by Jim



Andrew Kendall has been involved with ESI since its founding in 2002, and is responsible for the day to day operation of the charity.

Foxall outlining the most effective way of drey shooting.

ESI continues to be contacted by the media and other opinion formers for its views and thoughts on grey squirrels, the damage they cause and the best ways of eradicating them. We take the lead and that has always been our stance.

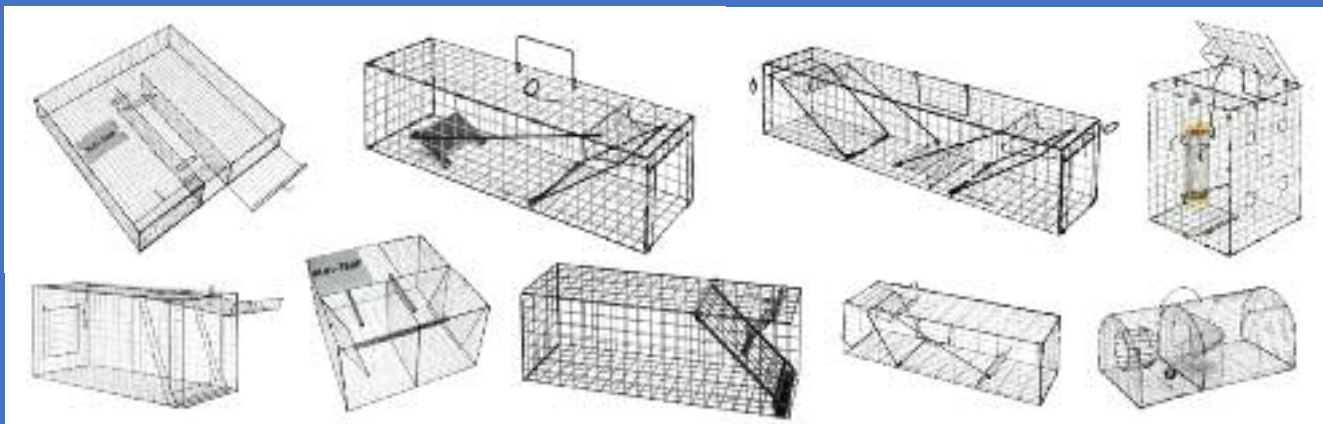
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Gene Drive – The Only Solution

By Richard Coke

Many individuals and forestry organisations are under the illusion that just reducing grey squirrel numbers is an effective long-term solution to reducing tree damage. In my opinion it is not. There is a prevailing and rather patronising 'group think' view that the public would not stand for eradication. My own experience of dealing with this is that they would be supportive if given the facts and shown the consequences of not doing so.

The current UK Government Grey Squirrel policy is:

1. To back immunocontraception - a 70% take up is targeted, but it is not yet known how often the animal has to ingest the bait to remain infertile. The remaining 30% will continue to breed normally.
2. Support introduction of pine martens and encourage other predator control e.g. goshawks.
3. Revise & update the 2014 Grey Squirrel Action Plan - the new version is due to be published this summer, but unless something fundamentally different is proposed, nothing will change the current destructive outcomes.
4. Support local and landscape scale control groups with financial support from Countryside Stewardship funds in a few areas.

The above is an approach which has been the core of ineffective policy for the last decade and it will continue to fail to deliver a long-term solution. The 2021 RFS report estimated that the cost of tree damage by grey squirrels in England and Wales is at least £37 million per annum. It concludes that shooting and trapping, where intensively carried out can reduce numbers in the short term,

but rapidly build back up due to their prolific breeding capacity and recolonization from neighbouring rural or urban areas. Therefore, any other control method that simply reduces numbers is not a long-term solution.

The status quo means that:

1. Control has to go on in perpetuity - not sustainable.
2. A period when control is not carried out means that all previous work is wasted and severe damage occurs.
3. Any control work is extremely labour intensive. This is time and money that should be spent on forestry operations.
4. The red squirrel will not be able to recolonize until the grey squirrel has been eradicated from entire areas.
5. To achieve eradication, the grey squirrel has to be removed from both urban areas and rural areas where landowners carry out little or no control. Gene drive is currently the only potential means of doing this.
6. Grey squirrel damage remains one of the biggest disincentives to active woodland management and creation.
7. Eradication would be hugely beneficial to song birds.
8. Without eradication, there is little chance of producing high quality timber which is desperately needed to lessen our dependence on imports.

THE SOLUTION

The European Squirrel Initiative (ESI) is working with the Roslin Institute on a potential eradication mechanism using Gene Drive technology, which works by skewing the sex ratio so that the offspring are, for instance, all male. There would be no recurring costs.

It is crucial that the UK Government help with funding this vital research by



diverting a tiny proportion of the vast sums already committed, namely £1.5bn at COP26 and more at COP27 to save the rain forests, £500m+ to the England Trees Action Plan and £650m to Nature for Climate Fund. An estimated £10m is required to get the project to licensing. To date the Forestry Commission have contributed £.3m plus a PhD placement.

As is evidenced by previous failures of larger scale tree planting, many have concluded that much of the money being spent on establishing trees will be wasted if the grey squirrel is not eradicated. The long-term sustainability of our forests remains gravely threatened, as grey squirrel damaged trees will contribute little or nothing to either timber production or carbon sequestration. The Forestry Commission is "..... responsible for protecting, expanding and promoting the sustainable management of woodlands." How is this compatible with conserving the grey squirrel?

The Public Forest estate could do so much to educate the millions of visitors as to why the grey squirrel must be eradicated, showing them the damage and what it will likely end up looking like – an unproductive dangerous eyesore. Would these visitors ultimately object to seeing a red squirrel? Of course not – they would be thrilled!



In Response to Richard Coke's article from Charles Dutton, ESI Trustee

To the Editor,

I write in reply to Toby Coke's letter titled 'The grey squirrel problem' (October 2023 QUF) in which he outlines some of the issues that are faced by the use of immunocontraceptives (IMC).

Sadly I must agree with the author but for different reasons.

I have been involved with grey squirrel control for 40+ years and like many foresters 40 years ago, I believed that grey squirrels could not be controlled completely, at least that is what we were told. I was lucky to meet and work with Prof. Robert Kenward in Dorset and for a decade, we were able to control and predict damage by grey squirrels over 1000 hectares of the Charborough Estate. His research work was written up in various QUF publications.

More recently, I came across the IUCN's seminar in New Zealand in 2002 and its publication *Turning the Tide*, the eradication of invasive species. The keynote address was given by Prof. Simberloff, and he said "The eradication of invasive non-indigenous species is often viewed as an impossible goal and an approach historically typified by high profile failures. However there have been @ surprising number of successful eradications of animal and plants". The document lists hundreds of examples of successful eradication projects from around the world and they all follow a similar format. The format is so successful that organisations such as our own RSPB are using the approach today on projects on Gough Island (South Atlantic) and the Pitcairn Islands. The approach advocated by Prof. Simberloff is that you must "knock the population down" before you can "mop it up". I explain more on pages 51-55 of my book (see below).

In writing the book, I was asked, "why are we still failing to control grey squirrels

and what can we do about it in the future that is different?"

In the past, we have only ever been able to use methods that will control grey squirrels at the phase 3 (mop up) level, ie. the bottom of the population curve. The use of Warfarin gave us a phase 2 level of control but only if it was used correctly and at an increased hopper density, but all too often one grower would be operating correctly but the neighbour put the odd hopper out around the woods and baited them once a year. This then led to failure.

My fear is that IMCs will be similar to Warfarin. It will need constant re-application to have any local success and unless you have a constant effort as with Warfarin, it will fail. IMC will rely on everyone within the landscape area applying the bait and re-applying more-or-less at the same time. If one or more applicants fails to keep applying the bait, grey squirrels will re-colonise the area with fresh 'active males' for breeding and all the work will be undone.

Gene drive will I understand give us a phase 1, 2 & 3 level of control and will have a built-in shelf life, ie. it will control grey squirrels regardless of the population density.

Often there is talk of pine martens and they will provide us with control and indeed they do seem to keep grey squirrels in check in Ireland. It would be useful to know if anyone is in active communication with the people involved in Ireland. The European Squirrel Initiative led a very interesting and informative Study Tour to Northern Ireland in April 2016 to look at the impact of pine martens on game and other ground nesting birds such as lapwing, curlew and grey partridge. One lesson learnt was that we need to be very careful, especially in the lowlands, about what we wish for as pine martens

will predate on the nests of these ground nesting birds. The guidelines from the IUCN Annex 6 are very clear about the impact of re-introducing species, in so much as the consequences of such any re-introduction must be taken into account and that what is already on site has priority over anything being re-introduced, if there is likely to be conflict.

For the UK, pine martens may well help but really only in upland areas if collateral damage is to be kept to a minimum. Lowland Britain is not the place for pine martens in my view as the collateral damage will be very high and all the hard work being done to save red data book species as mentioned, could be undone, as evident from Ireland.

Gene drive is the way forward if we are serious about wanting to grow broadleaves in lowland Britain and to stop the waste of taxpayers' money on grants for planting broadleaves that without proper effective grey squirrel control will never develop into the types of woodland that will fully contribute to social, environmental and economic objectives.

In a paper yet to be submitted to the QUF, I intend to set out some recent findings based on research on tree species that can be grown without being vulnerable to grey squirrel damage and how one can grow broadleaves which will not be damaged. The later point was written about in QUF April 1988.

I will not be here in 50 years' time and I sincerely hope that people are not writing about the same failures. Simberloff's book is a must read and I urge the Royal Forestry Society to support gene drive research. The technology looks very promising and the sector should be doing everything it can to support its development and implementation. Charles Dutton FICFor
1 November 2023



Quietly Does It – The Art of Drey Shooting

by Jim Foxall

Three years ago, I was asked by a very good farmer friend of mine if I could do anything about the grey squirrel infestation of some woodlands that he owned. His woodlands were suffering from the usual squirrel damage with stunted and dying trees resulting from bark stripping. I'm not going to go into grey squirrel damage in this article as this was covered in Mat Manning's excellent article, "Thinking Inside the Box", in the September/October issue of the BASC Magazine. However, I would add that anyone reading this article should read Charles Dutton's "The Grey Squirrel Management Handbook", sponsored by the European Squirrel Initiative. This booklet is a masterpiece of various methods of grey squirrel control, the species of trees most vulnerable to squirrel attack, some case studies and the resulting reduction in the value of the lumber.

As a result of my farmer friend's request, my son and I considered the various options on reducing the grey squirrel population as quickly as possible. The woodlands were not on our doorstep, and the time taken to get to the woodlands meant that daily visits to traps, filling baiting stations or waiting in a hide were not viable options. We needed instant results.

Taking these factors into account we came up with an alternative solution. Rather than the squirrels come to us using a bait station we would seek them out and no better place than their dreys.

There were a number of considerations to be taken into account. Firstly, we had to be fairly sure that the squirrels would be in residence. This always meant dusk, wet or cold days which encourage them to retire early to their dreys. Secondly, it means spotting the dreys which limited us to those



months where there was not too much foliage. Other considerations during the summer months is the undergrowth, battling through nettles is not fun and the possibility of mistaking bird nests for dreys. Additionally, dusk during the summer months can be as late as 10pm. Bearing in mind the above factors means effectively there are six or seven months or so of shooting opportunities.

Our chosen method is to shoot dreys with shotguns and we have honed this to a fine art. Maximising our success rate means the two of us operating together. Our chosen guns are 12 bore pump shotguns and I'll explain a little later why we use pump guns. Our choice of cartridges are low-velocity subsonics, 35g 7.5. Coupled with the subsonic cartridges we use an A-tec sound moderator. These moderators seem to be more effective with subsonic cartridges than normal cartridges. The only issue with subsonic cartridges is that they don't cycle semi-auto shotguns very well, hence the pump shotguns.

Our guns have magnetic barrel mounts whereby we can add a slimline torch which uses a high powered beam to identify dreys in fading light. We travel light and use cartridge belts holding 25 cartridges or for larger woods a belt which holds 50 cartridges. Each of us

has a small drawstring bag with a plastic liner similar in style to a rucksack which fits over shoulders.

Style of clothing is irrelevant just as long as there is free movement and appropriate to the weather conditions. We use face masks and thin gloves. A vital piece of our equipment is our walkie-talkies, these are a necessity to keep in touch when we fan out looking for dreys. The walkie-talkies are wired with an ear-piece and lapel microphone. The face-mask, apart from keeping out the cold, keeps walkie-talkie wires neatly tucked away.





When a drey is located, we find the best positions around the tree, preferably on opposite sides with as unobstructed a view of the drey as possible. I tend to take the first shot which flushes the squirrels out of the drey. It's then a question of nailing them as they run along the branches or head on up the trunk of the tree. It is unpredictable just how many squirrels that a drey can accommodate. If a drey holds four squirrels then you have to be on your game to shoot the lot. Those that do escape never seem to come back to a drey that has been previously shot. Over time, we have a fair idea of predicting those dreys that are active. Active dreys tend to be spherical and tightly packed. When these dreys are shot they tend to rock and not be blown apart. If, a drey is blown apart then that drey is almost certainly not active. The first shot we take at the drey tends to have a similar effect to that of drey poking and flushes out any squirrels. There is always an element of doubt whether a drey contains any squirrels and we have tried using a thermal camera looking for heat signatures. This proved unsuccessful. To make this point, we once scanned a drey which appeared lifeless, however, on shooting the drey four squirrels "exploded" from it. Readers may have some ideas on using thermal imaging scopes rather than a camera.

The effectiveness of this method of drey shooting has been proven time after time. On one occasion we were asked to clear a small neglected wood of four by two hundred metres and removed 60 plus squirrels in four visits. Annual follow up visits revealed little further infestation. Most average sized woods require no more than three visits.

Over the past years that we have employed the above method of grey squirrel control we have never been challenged by anyone for a number of reasons. During the period of dusk most walkers have gone home. The combination of the sub-sonic cartridges and the silencer change the sound of the shot to a noise something akin to



hitting a plastic drainpipe with a stick and is unrecognisable as a normal shotgun discharge. With permission, we have shot within 40 metres of property and they have not been aware of our shots.

As keen environmentalists, we belong to the Red Squirrel Survival Trust (RSST) and Small Woods Association. We carry out our grey squirrel removal services completely free. If the woodland owner wishes to make a donation to the RSST

then that is a bonus. We live in the East Midlands and tend to keep our activities roughly within its bounds. Should readers wish for us to come along and demonstrate exactly how we go about grey squirrel removal, then please get in touch. Alternatively, if you have a woodland grey squirrel infestation we would be happy to help in removing them. My contact details are: jimfoxall@btinternet.com or 07780 848 042.





The True Cost of Grey Squirrel Damage (Part 2)

Graham Taylor MBE FICFor

In my last article (December 2022) I outlined a best estimate of the annual opportunity cost or loss that woodland owners are experiencing across England following Grey Squirrel (GS) damage. The estimated figure of c £60 million / annum was based on the proportion of England's broadleaved woodlands that have been in the damage phase since the 1960s and what has happened to them over the last six decades. Of course, many diligent private estates do keep GS populations in check, but they are exceedingly rare and most suffer from large amounts of browsing losses to mixed and pure stands of Oak, Beech, Sycamore, Sweet Chestnut and others.

Cumulatively in actively managed forests over many decades this damage has multiple effects:

a) Change to species composition:

younger woodland planted as a wide mix of native broadleaves change. These changes occur as those species which are GS susceptible lose their leaders and lose out through competition to faster growing non susceptible species. For many years foresters have accommodated this by using a wide array of species to ensure successful canopy continuity.

b) Change in Value profile: every species has a value profile. The loss of oak for example as a main component in the forest stand, might reduce the incremental value from over £500/ha / annum to a more paltry value of £120-150/ha/ annum. Over decades this reduction makes a significant dent in cumulative profitability. The attached photographs illustrate 25 year old damaged Oak in the Chilterns compared with healthy 25 year old undamaged oak trees. The latter shows promise, the former won't even produce good quality firewood..

c) Change in disease risk: the narrowing of species composition within a stand or forest renders it much more susceptible to disease risk if that species itself then suffers with a damaging disease outbreak. Foresters across England are now busy clearing stands where Ash now dominates in stands which had started their life as oak and

beech dominated mixtures in stands established perhaps 30 years ago became Ash dominated and then subsequently succumbed to Chalara.

The inability to produce high quality timbers itself has a significant economic cost which weighs even more heavily on England and its ability to be self-sufficient in sustainable timber production. If timber is not produced here in the UK, it has to be imported into the UK in the form of raw product (sawn / finished timber) or even higher value solid timber products. Since the nation deforested the UK has become a large importer of coniferous, temperate and tropical hardwood timbers. According to Forest Research (2022) the UK Sawmilling sector milled c 71k green

tonnes of hardwood timbers of which 59k tonnes or 65.5 m³ roundwood produced from mainly English forests. Once milled this equates to c 32.75k m³ of sawn hardwood timber being produced and sold. According to TDUK, in 2022 a total of 504k m³ of tropical and temperate hardwood timbers were imported, making total hardwood timber consumption a total of 536.75k m³ the home supply just 6.1% of the market for hardwood timber in the UK. The figure for hardwood imports excludes the value and volume of imported hardwood timber products such as Oak furniture or Beech worktop. The value of hardwood timbers vary according to demand and consumption patterns, but a cautious average would put an estimated value of £433 million / annum (TDUK 2022) for that portion of the multi-billion import bill for timber and timber products.

It has been those broadleaved woodlands areas largely established after the Second World War, which were noticeably affected by extensive grey squirrel damage during the 1950's and



Fig 1. 25 year old GS damaged Oak



Fig 2. 25 year old undamaged Oak



Table 3 - Impact of GS damage on stand valuations at maturity in England

	Quality	YC	Undamaged		1st Grade %	Volume 1st Grade	2nd Grade %	Volume 2nd Grade	1st Grade Millable Volume (60%)	2nd Grade Millable Volume (50%)	2nd Grade		Total	% Damaged	Total Actual Cost of Future Imports / Quality Class £	
			Mature Value £ / Ha	Mature Volume					Conversion)	Conversion (50%)	1st Grade Import Value £/m³	2nd Grade Import Value £/m³	Future Import Cost / ha			Heavertage in damage phase by spp (ha)
Oak	High	6	84000	300	50	150	30	90	90	36	1500	960	100560	40442	90	6,171,610,968
	Medium	4	45000	250	40	100	30	75	60	30	1500	960	118800	40442	60	2,882,705,760
	Low	4	25000	220	30	66	40	88	40	15.2	1500	960	93192	40442	30	1,130,661,259
Beech	High	6	12500	300	40	120	30	90	72	36	950	800	97200	25550	90	2,235,114,000
	Low	4	12500	250	30	75	40	100	45	40	950	800	74750	25550	50	954,931,250
Sweet Chestnut	High	8	40000	300	40	120	30	90	72	36	1400	960	125360	3650	50	247,032,000
	Low	4	15000	250	30	75	40	100	45	40	1400	960	101400	3650	30	111,031,000
	Coppice	10	2500		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sycamore	High	8	15000	280	40	112	0	0	67	0	950	800	63840	18250	80	932,084,000
	Low	4	12000	240	30	72	0	0	43	0	950	800	41040	30500	40	599,184,000
Birch	Medium	6	9000		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	69350	50	0
303826																
Total Cost of Future Import Substitution =															15,284,336,237	
Annualised Future Import Cost over 60 years =															254,401,604	

1960's, and in the absence of control damage has been consistent on areas of new woodland creation and restocking of existing woodlands. This is a period of about 60-70 years, or about 40-50% of a typical 120 to 140-year oak rotation.

Using the same hectareage and quality class figures used to estimate the annual opportunity cost / loss to growers in the annualised loss analysis (Part 1 2022), the future importing cost equivalent has been calculated the where failure of those areas of new planting and restocking to produce high quality hardwood timber and produce low grade firewood only.

To represent the variability of site types in England the species affected by GS damage have been split in differing quality classes. E.g. for Oak there are higher Yield class (YC6) more fertile sites which are capable of growing Oak sawlogs in 120 years. Slower grown sites (YC4) are further split into a medium quality and lower quality, where the proportion and quality of oak timber have lower values and lower percentages of a final crop. The proportions good quality sawlog in a mature stand of a future clearfell value are then calculated. These are the values which the stand should have produced were they not to have been squirrel damaged.

The parts of the table highlighted yellow and green translate the round timber sawlog volume one might have

expected to produce and translate them first into volume of 1st and 2nd grades of planking and their sawn wood m3 equivalents. The relative cost of import of that grade of timber by species is applied and the future import cost of the equivalent volume of sawn timber for each hectare is assessed. Eg 1 ha of mature high value oak might have a stand value of £84k / ha. This stand would typically have 300m³ / ha of which 50% (150m³/ha) might be primary grade and 90m³/ha of secondary grade. These have millable conversion rates of 60% & 50% respectively. Cautious values of imported prime oak of £1500/m³ and £960/m³ have been applied to these volumes and thus eg. for every hectare of YC6 oak that is not grown here has to be substituted with an import of sawnwood which has a value of £169,500 for that hectare lost to squirrel damage.

Using this approach and then applying the lost timber value by species and quality class, this can be applied to the hectares which are being damaged / lost to Grey squirrels a 'best estimate' annual basis. Using the woodland area data provided by the NFI, it has been estimated that GS damage might have affected 142700 ha over the last 60 years, or the equivalent of c 2378 ha / annum over the same period.

Using this desktop approach, it suggests that a total equivalent of £254 million / annum of hardwood timber imports will be required to replace the

lost incremental value of the last 60 years, or a cumulative figure of £15.24 billion over that same period. This figure may still be an over-estimate as not all areas started growing oak, and not all areas have been damaged. It is worthy of note that 41.7% of the potential value lost is found in the stands of highest yield and quality class of oak across the country. Faster grown oak is more susceptible to GS damage and hence the figures in this quality class category are pretty sound and wherever one turns when inspecting / managing those sites, it is rare to find stands which are predominantly undamaged. What is also not possible to ascertain is the percentage of woodland which was intended to be oak dominated when replanting / planting took place, but which after 20-30 years has subsequently become dominated by GS damage resistant species eg Ash / Cherry/ Alder.

The impacts of the damage are being felt now through lost increment and value to the tune of £60 million / annum. There is a future and even larger cost of failure which will contribute to an even larger loss in balance of trade from the 2080's onwards. This desk based assessment is just that, but the future losses dwarf the current losses by a significant margin, even if the 'theoretical maximum' outlined is an overstatement.

Graham Taylor MBE FICFor
January 2024



A-Team Action

Amidst the briar and under the trees you'll find, Austin Scott-Kennedy at Crooked Tree Copse. On this ten-acre patch of Dorset woodland, owned by Austin's family, you will also find patrolling a squadron of bushy tailed tree assassins, impeding the family's attempts to restore this ancient, over-stood hazel copse to its diverse glory. That was until, Charles Dutton, a friend of Austin's father, gave him a copy of his book, "The Grey Squirrel Management

Handbook". Austin (aged 10) was captivated and shocked to realise the destruction grey squirrels have on flora and fauna.

With a new understanding of their habits, Austin set out to building a 'squirrel box', using the plans in Charles's handbook. Like an honorary member of The A-Team, using scrap pieces of wood and tools from his Dad's shed, he completed the box. Adding a Fenn trap and a bag of whole maize to



his arsenal, Austin set out to the frontline of the copse to begin his battle. As you can see from photos, his counter-offensive is looking promising.

SQUIRREL

This is the 41st edition of The Squirrel, and here at ESI we are constantly looking at ways to improve our communication with our readers and supporters. In order to help improve communication with you all we will be producing an e-newsletter in addition to the printed magazine that you already enjoy.

This will also allow us to communicate with our readers more regularly.

Please could you email info@europeansquirrelinitiative.org with your email details or complete the form below and send to:

European Squirrel Initiative, Henstead Old Rectory, Beccles, Suffolk, NR34 7LA

Name _____ Email address _____



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everyone who has
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Braised squirrel, horseradish mash, sprout tops and hazelnut jus

BRAISED SQUIRREL

6 grey squirrels
750ml of red wine
¼ bunch of fresh thyme
¼ bunch of fresh rosemary
½ head of garlic
- peeled and cloves chopped
1 leek, cut into 2cm dice
½ head of celery, cut into 2cm dice
Plain flour, for dusting
Vegetable oil
100g of roasted hazelnuts
- roughly chopped

HORSERADISH MASH

4 Maris Piper potatoes
- peeled and roughly chopped
50ml of double cream
50g of butter
1 tbsp of horseradish, freshly grated
or creamed, add more or less to taste

SPROUT TOPS

2 sprout tops, leaves shredded
1 knob of butter
Salt
Freshly ground black pepper

Instructions

1. To prepare the squirrels, cut the rib bones out with sharp scissors, then cut each squirrel in half along the backbone.
2. Add the pieces to a deep tray or dish and pour over the red wine to cover. Mix in a little of the thyme and rosemary, making sure all pieces of the squirrel meat are covered. Cover with clingfilm and leave to marinate in the fridge for a few hours.
3. After this time, remove the squirrel and pat dry with kitchen towel. Lightly dust with flour and add to a large casserole pan with a glug of vegetable oil.
4. Seal the meat quickly on all sides until lightly browned, then set aside. Add the chopped vegetables, garlic and remaining thyme and rosemary to the pan and allow to colour slightly.
5. Add the squirrel back to the pan and pour in the red wine from the marinade. Allow this to simmer and reduce by about two-thirds volume, then add the chicken stock and bring to a boil.
6. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 90°C/gas mark ¼.
7. Skim off any residue on the surface, then cover the pan with a tight fitting lid or a sheet of foil. Cook in the preheated oven for 4–6 hours, checking every now and again to ensure it is not drying out.
8. When cooked through, the meat should fall off the bone. Allow to cool, then take the squirrel pieces out of the braising liquid and place on a baking tray and cover with foil.
9. Strain the braising liquid through a fine sieve into a clean saucepan and place back on the heat. Allow to reduce down until it reaches a thick sauce consistency, then stir in the hazelnuts. Keep warm until ready to serve.
10. Meanwhile, boil the potatoes in a large pan of salted water until soft, then drain and return to the pan. Mash with the cream, butter and horseradish until smooth (you may need to add a little more cream if too thick).
11. Sauté the sprout tops in a large pan with a knob of butter until slightly wilted. Season well with salt and pepper.
12. Preheat the oven to 180°C/gas mark 4.
13. To serve, reheat the squirrel pieces on the tray in the oven for 5 minutes, or until hot all the way through. Serve with the horseradish mash and buttered greens, with the hazelnut sauce poured over.



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