

# Red Squirrels United SciuriousLIFE

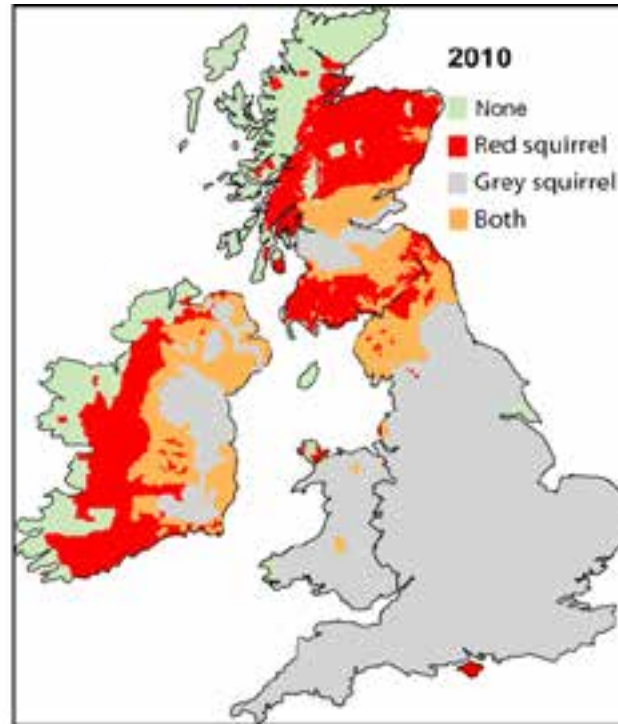
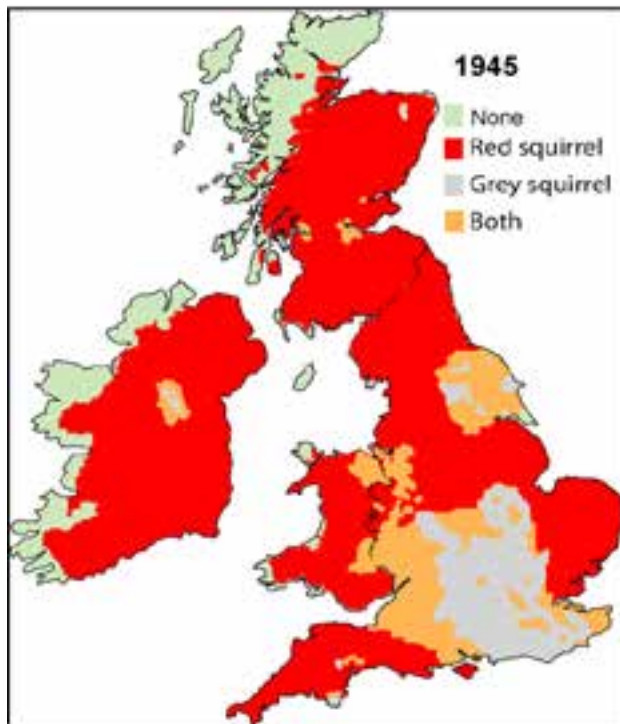
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Helping to secure the future of red squirrels in the UK



The red squirrel has lived in forests and woodlands across the UK since the end of the last ice age, 10,000 years ago. Their numbers have declined drastically over the last century and now there are approximately 140,000 left in the wild. Grey squirrels were brought to the UK in the 1800s by the Victorians, the first record of them escaping and establishing a wild population was in 1876. Since then they have spread across much of the UK. They arrived in Ireland in 1911.

Many scientific studies show that the introduction of the grey squirrel from North America has been the major factor in the red squirrel's decline over the past century. This is due to competition for food and shelter and spread of the squirrelpox virus (which grey squirrels can transmit to red squirrels). Unfortunately, without conservation management, red squirrels will become extinct from the UK mainland. This map shows the rapid decline of the red squirrel over the past century.



Red and grey squirrel distribution in the British Isles in 1945 and 2010.  
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## Why can't red squirrels and grey squirrels live together?

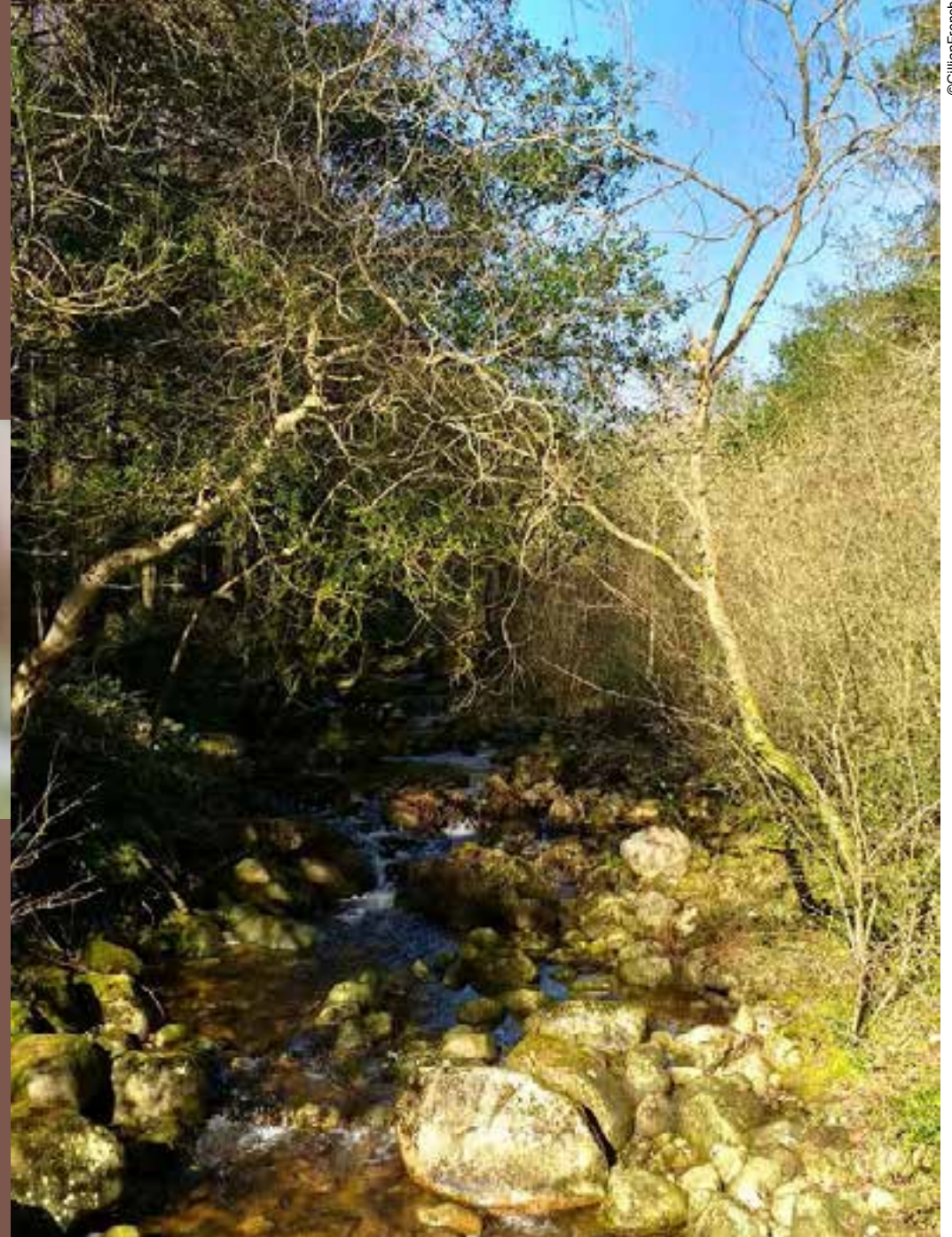
If red and grey squirrels could live together long-term, red squirrels would be more widespread throughout the UK mainland. However, grey squirrels are larger and compete more successfully than red squirrels for food and habitat. This forces red squirrels into less suitable areas, such as conifer forests, where they can find it more difficult to survive. In addition grey squirrels can carry squirrelpox virus which is fatal to red squirrels.



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## What are the main threats to red squirrels?

Habitat loss has also contributed to the red squirrel's decline. Habitat loss and fragmentation occurs when areas of woodland are destroyed or become separated by development or changing land-use. This can lead to isolated woodland patches which cannot sustain viable populations of wildlife, including red squirrels, in some places.



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## What is squirrelpox and what can be done about it?

Squirrelpox is a virus carried by grey squirrels, without causing them harm, but it is fatal to red squirrels. Squirrelpox causes scabs and sores in and around the eyes, nose, mouth, feet, ears and genitalia. An infected red squirrel can become unable to see or to feed properly. It rapidly becomes dehydrated and malnourished and as a result most will die within 15 days of infection.

There is no cure or vaccine for squirrelpox, so to protect red squirrels from infection we need to keep grey squirrels away from red squirrels. Grey squirrels are fairly ubiquitous across our landscape but they pose a particular threat to red squirrel populations, in these areas grey squirrels need to be removed or kept away.

## What is Red Squirrels United doing?

Red Squirrels United recognises that grey squirrels are well established in the UK and it is not feasible for them to be removed completely. We are facing up to the challenge of retaining our native red squirrel populations despite the presence of invasive grey. We are working across the country to determine the best methods and strategies for long term management of both species. We recognise the need to have the support of local communities to share responsibilities for the protection of the red squirrels. We are providing training and support to develop the skills needed to make this happen.



Organisations, volunteers and other conservationists have been involved in local conservation work and projects to protect red squirrels for many years. The Red Squirrels United partnership is joining up some of these initiatives. The partnership is working together with other academics, practitioners and volunteers to deliver a unique programme of coordinated red squirrel conservation and knowledge sharing across the country. Red Squirrels United is working in the areas highlighted on the map above where red squirrel populations are under threat from invasive grey squirrels. The focus for Red Squirrels United is to protect and increase the remaining red squirrel populations across Northern Ireland, Northern England and Wales.



## Preventing subsequent grey squirrel invasions of the island of Anglesey (Red Squirrels Trust Wales)

Following the complete eradication of invasive grey squirrels from Anglesey in 2013, a small number of grey squirrels have since been found on Anglesey. The EU LIFE funded project is investigating to what extent these animals naturally disperse across the Menai Strait from the mainland and whether they might have arrived using rail, road or sea transport. We hope the lessons learned will be transferable to management of other invasive species, allowing us to share best practice to address one of the leading causes of biodiversity loss around the world.

## Mourne Mountains (Ulster Wildlife)

In Northern Ireland red squirrels have been reintroduced into Mourne Park. Red Squirrels United is working in the surrounding landscape to keep the area free from grey squirrels. This is to allow this reintroduced population to expand. Here the project is using the Mourne Mountains as a natural barrier to maintain a grey squirrel free area for the conservation of red squirrels. In Fermanagh, Londonderry/Derry and Strabane Red Squirrels United is raising awareness of red squirrel conservation and the need for grey squirrel control through community engagement and supporting the establishment of local volunteer groups.

## Squirrels in rural areas (Northumberland Wildlife Trust and Ulster Wildlife)

Protecting red squirrels in rural parts of northern England is challenging as the presence of grey squirrels can go undetected until a significant population has established. In rural Northumberland, Red Squirrels United is developing a novel 'Early Warning System'. We are using fixed wildlife camera observations on a regular basis to inform local 'rapid response' groups of the presence of red and grey squirrels in these rural areas. It has been shown that where grey squirrels are detected, acting quickly offers the best chance of protecting the red populations.

## Squirrels in urban areas (The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside)

Seeing squirrels in your back garden or local park is a great way to engage with wildlife. Merseyside has a large population of people compared to the other areas that we work in. Red Squirrels United is working with local communities there to raise awareness and encourage people to report squirrel sightings. This means the community can make a significant difference to our work. A community based rapid response approach to grey squirrel control is taking place. This provides good opportunities for people living in urban areas to engage with conservation.



## Working with science (Forest Research and Newcastle University)

We monitor all our conservation work at Red Squirrels United to learn from our actions and improve best practice. We collect data on the distribution of red and grey squirrels to predict how to protect the remaining red squirrel populations. We share our learning from actions implemented across all the project areas. This will help plan the management of red squirrel populations in the future. We also want to understand more about the squirrelpox virus and we are studying how control of the grey squirrels can protect reds from the disease.

## Working with communities

Our Forest Research partner is working across all project areas, exploring community attitudes to red and grey squirrels. We know that there are different attitudes towards red and grey squirrels in rural and urban areas and between those who have grown up seeing red squirrels on a regular basis compared with those who have never seen a red squirrel. By understanding differing attitudes in different areas we can focus our work and develop education and awareness campaigns.



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## Working across borders

Squirrels don't take any notice of land, county or country borders. Red Squirrels United is engaged with various organisations to work together across all types of borders. This level of cooperation is now even more relevant as the UK looks towards life outside of the European Union. Red and grey squirrels do cross the border from the Republic into the North and vice versa. Ulster Wildlife is working with organisations and groups in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Having good communication links and awareness of respective legislation is vital for work in this area.

Ulster Wildlife, Scottish Wildlife Trust and Northumberland Wildlife Trust are looking at opportunities for working across international and regional boundaries. This is significant as there are different legal systems, enforcement policies and countryside management practices in these areas. Red Squirrels United works closely with Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels to ensure that all parts of the UK are involved in red squirrel conservation.



## Who is involved in Red Squirrels United?

Red Squirrels United, coordinated by The Wildlife Trusts, is a partnership of organisations from Wales, England and Northern Ireland:

- Northumberland Wildlife Trust
- The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside
- Red Squirrels Trust Wales
- The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales
- Ulster Wildlife
- Newcastle University
- Forest Research

We are working closely with Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels to ensure a joined-up approach to red squirrel conservation is taken across the whole of the UK.

We are working alongside a range of community groups and organisation including land owners, estate managers and farmers and volunteers. We hold an annual knowledge fair where anyone interested in helping red squirrels and controlling the numbers of grey squirrels can meet to share ideas.





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