

# Red Squirrel Facts

## Facts

Red squirrels are rodents. They typically weigh 280-350g and have a body that is 205-220mm in length with a 180mm long tail.

## Status

Classified as Lower Risk - near threatened by the IUCN Red List, and listed under Appendix III of the Berne Convention. Threatened in the UK, and protected under Schedules 5 and 6 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

## Description

This attractive mammal has a chestnut upper body, with buff to cream underside, noticeable ear tufts and the famous fluffy tail. The red squirrel moults its coat twice a year but the ear tufts and the tail are only moulted annually. It is a smaller animal than the introduced grey squirrel.

## Range

Across most of Europe into northern Asia and Siberia. In this part of its range the red squirrel is not threatened. In the UK it is restricted to a few sites, mainly those free from competition by grey squirrels, which is why it is classified as threatened.

## Habitat

Red squirrels prefer woodland that contains a fair proportion of conifer trees. In Europe they are found in large forests, gardens and parks and at altitudes of up to 2000 m. In the UK they are now chiefly confined to conifer forests but can live in mixed woodland that has yet to be invaded by greys.

## Biology

Red squirrels do not hibernate but they do lay down stores of food to see them through periods when fresh food is not available. Where they are found in mixed broadleaf and coniferous woodland they have a source of food all year round, as pine seeds are present over the winter months. However, red squirrels have quite a varied diet which includes seeds, buds, flowers, leaves and fruit. They are known to take insects, fungi and birds' eggs.

Red squirrels build nests, called dreys, from sticks and moss and placed high in the branches. They produce two litters of three to four kittens a year, usually in March and July. The drey is often the first evidence of the presence of red squirrels in a wood. Other signs are chewed pine cone 'cores' (birds leave ragged remains), split hazel nut shells

(dormice make a hole to extract the kernel), cut tree shoots and scattered droppings.

Red squirrels can live for up to six years. They are chiefly active during the day and most of this time is spent foraging. Bad weather can seriously hinder this activity and, without food the squirrels can only survive for a few days.

### **Threats**

There is evidence to suggest that red squirrels have fluctuated in numbers in the UK since the last ice age. In the last 50 years, however, their dramatic decline has been due to loss and fragmentation of habitat, disease and in particular, competition from the introduced grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*). The two species are known to coexist in some locations but while there is no evidence of aggressive behaviour by greys, competition for limited food sources tends to favour the introduced animal.

Source: English Nature

[http://www.arkive.org/species/ARK/mammals/Sciurus\\_vulgaris/more\\_info.html](http://www.arkive.org/species/ARK/mammals/Sciurus_vulgaris/more_info.html)