



# Grey Squirrels Trapping Guidance Note

Prepared by  
The European Squirrel Initiative

Grey squirrels are an invasive alien species, which were first introduced into the UK in 1876 and have now spread across most of the country. A destructive pest, they cause serious damage to trees, to song bird populations and our native red squirrel. They are attracted to and cause damage to game bird feeders.

[www.europeansquirrelinitiative.org](http://www.europeansquirrelinitiative.org)

# The Law

## It is illegal to release a grey squirrel back into the wild!

Red Squirrels have been protected against intentional acts of damage or disturbance since 1981 under the UK Wildlife and Countryside Act (WACA), Schedule 5. Protection for Red Squirrels and other species was amended by the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act, 2004 to include both intentional and reckless acts (see FCS guidance note 'Forest operations and wildlife in Scottish forests'). Subject to certain exceptions, it is now an offence to 'intentionally or recklessly:

- Kill, injure or take (capture) a Red Squirrel
- Damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place which a Red Squirrel uses for shelter or protection or,
- Disturb a Red Squirrel while it is occupying a structure or place which it uses for that purpose.

Anyone who carries out, or knowingly causes or permits these acts to occur could be committing an offence.

- Under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 Section 11 and the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 Article 12, if any person uses a decoy, for the purpose of killing or taking any wild mammal, they shall be guilty of an offence
- Under the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996 and the Welfare of Animals (Northern Ireland) Act 1972 Article 21, it is illegal to: mutilate, kick, beat, nail, impale, stab, burn, stone, crush, drag, drown or asphyxiate any wild mammal with intent to **inflict unnecessary suffering**
- The Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996 does not apply to lawful pest control or humane dispatch of injured mammals. Unlawful use may include trespassing or acting without the consent of the landowner
- The Animal Welfare Act 2006 imposes a duty on the trapper not to be cruel to the animal.

## Control methods

Trapping and Warfarin are the most effective methods of controlling grey squirrels. Trapping can be done via live capture traps, lethal spring traps and Kania traps.

- Warfarin may not be used outdoors where red squirrels occur
- Spring traps may not be used within 10 kilometres of a red squirrel population.

Other methods of control include drey poking in grey squirrel areas only and shooting.

# Trapping

Successful trapping can remove up to 90% of the resident grey squirrels.

- Traps must be inspected daily
- Traps must be firmly anchored
- Avoid capturing non-target species
- Avoid siting traps on or near public footpaths or areas where there may be susceptible wildlife such as otters
- If in doubt do not set a lethal trap
- Carcasses to be either incinerated, buried deeply or possibly sold to butchers or restaurants.

The best time for cage trapping is between February and August. Spring traps are effective all year around.



A spring trap set in a tunnel

## Type of traps

### Spring Traps

Fenn and Springer traps are set in tunnels.

- The tunnel should be at least 60cm long and its internal dimensions sufficient to allow the arms of the traps to strike unobstructed
- Entrance holes at either end of the tunnel should be no more than 8 – 10cm to deter animals larger than a squirrel from entering.

Body grip traps and Kania traps may also be used.

### Cage Traps

Cage traps can be used to take any animal which is not protected.

- They should be inspected at least a once a day
- Target animals must be despatched quickly and humanely
- Any non-target species must be released unharmed.



Yellow whole maize has proved to be the best all-round bait. It is cheap, stores well and is very visible to squirrels when scattered on the ground and up in trees. Uniquely, grey and red squirrels only eat the germ of the maize grain and discard the remainder. This indicates if squirrels have visited a trap site and/or hopper site. The maize bait can be supplemented with a small quantity of acorns, peanuts or hazelnuts to increase its attraction.

A period of pre-baiting is essential to give squirrels a chance to find cage traps and become used to feeding within them. Pre-baiting should last a minimum of 5 days, after which traps should be set for period of 4 -5 days. Pre-bait a wide area around each trap and then gradually reduce the area, so that the only maize is in the trap.

## Warfarin

Using Warfarin in specially design squirrel hoppers can remove all grey squirrels from a wood if the hopper density is correct.

- Warfarin may only be deployed out of doors against grey squirrels for tree protection between 15th March and 15th August
- Squirrels may be poisoned in loft spaces all year round
- Warfarin is regulated by the Control of Pesticides Regulation 1986.



The Grey Squirrels (Warfarin) Order 1973 permits the poisoning of grey squirrels with Warfarin for the purpose of tree protection. The Control of Pesticide Regulations 1986 specify on the product label (MAPP no 13020) how, where and when it may be deployed. These specifications include bait and the design and dimensions of the hopper. Operators must be trained before using Warfarin. It is a criminal offence to use Warfarin where red squirrels exist.

## Bait

Only the 0.02% Warfarin bait (Grey Squirrel Bait MAPP no. 13020) may be used. The approval for Grey Squirrel Liquid Concentrate MAFF no. 06455 has been revoked.

Gloves (unlined or flock-lined synthetic rubber or PVC to European Standard EN 374) should be worn when handling the bait and the control operation should be covered by a written Risk Assessment. Disposal of contaminated personal protective and other equipment should be through a registered waste contractor.

- Specialist hoppers should be used which are set to prevent animals larger than grey squirrels gaining access to the poison
- Hoppers should be spaced approximately 200 metres apart and at a density of one hopper to one to four hectares depending on density of the grey squirrel population.

## Procedure for hoppinging

- Prebait prior to 15th March for 10 to 14 days, i.e. at the end of February
- Broadcast the whole maize widely and keep the hopper topped up with maize, visit every two days, NEVER let the hopper become empty. Reduce the spread of the broadcast maize over the period until only the hopper has the maize
- When the grey squirrels are feeding well, usually after 10 -14 days, empty all the maize out into a sack and remove from site, fill the hopper with the Warfarin bait and keep the hopper topped up
- After 7 -10 days feeding will suddenly stop; this is dependent on the weather
- Lift hopper, re-site and start the procedure again
- Successful hoppinging is carried out between 15th March and the end of June.

In the interest of funding the research work of the European Squirrel Initiative, please complete the following short questionnaire and post back to the address provided.



Do grey squirrels damage plastic pheasant hoppers or other equipment?

▶

What was the estimated cost of such damage last year?

▶

Grey squirrels are often attracted to pheasant feed rides where they can be controlled. Do you find this a useful method to reduce populations?

▶

Have you ever witnessed grey squirrels preying wild partridge or pheasant eggs/chicks in the last year?

▶

How many grey squirrels did you kill in 2011?

▶

What is the approximate size of the woodland estate?

▶

Numbers and sexes in previous years, if known?

▶

Are there any red squirrels present in your area?

▶

What county are you in?

▶



Please check  
the weight and  
use correct  
postage stamp

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# Despatching squirrels

- Shooting at close range through the cage trap with an airgun is a humane and recommended method of despatch. However blood in the trap may deter other animals from entering and pose a risk of squirrel pox disease transfer, particularly where both red and grey squirrels are present.
- Sack method – A medium weight Hessiansack is used to extract the squirrel from the trap. Once in the sack the squirrel can be moved to a corner and with the head positioned, killed rapidly and humanely by a single blow to the back of the head with a blunt instrument.
- A trapping comb will help you with the removal or dispatch of the squirrel; use one or two combs to persuade the squirrel to move along the trap. The second comb is placed between the first comb and the squirrel as soon as possible, repeating until the squirrel is held at the far end of the trap. With the squirrel securely trapped you can easily place the Hessian sack over the end of the trap or dispatch with a gun.

## Disposal of carcasses

Where Warfarin is used carcasses should be disposed of as a controlled waste in a classified landfill site. Other carcasses may be left, if believed to be free from disease and distributed in suitable locations around woodland. Alternatively they may be buried provided they are not diseased or poisoned. If a carcass shows symptoms of squirrel pox virus (scabs around eyes, nose, mouth and feet) it should be sent to the State Veterinary Service for investigation.

To find your local office visit [www.animalhealth.defra.gov.uk](http://www.animalhealth.defra.gov.uk)



For further information and for a more detailed  
guidance note on trapping,  
please go to

[www.europeansquirrelinitiative.org.uk](http://www.europeansquirrelinitiative.org.uk)

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