

Biodiversity Links

The red squirrel is part of Scotland's biodiversity, (which means the variety of life, and includes, plants and animals and the places in which they live). To help children understand how everything links and review their understanding of biodiversity, photocopy the cards on the reverse of the red squirrel poster showing pictures of animals, plants and a human.

1. Ask them to group cards into animals and plants
2. Elicit simple ideas about the groupings e.g. the plants have green parts, the animals all move or any other grouping the children can think of

You can also use the cards on the back of the poster as a game to find simple food chains.



Glossary

Conifer – evergreen tree or shrub with narrow needle-like leaves which produce seeds in cones

Drey – is a squirrel's nest made of twigs lined with a cosy ball of moss leaves and grass to keep the squirrel warm

Predator – is an animal that gets its food by catching and eating other animals

Biodiversity

What can we do to help?

Looking after Scotland's wildlife and countryside is important if we want to keep red squirrels and the woodlands that they live in.

We can all help to look after the countryside by:

- Planting a tree or a wildlife garden
- Reducing and recycling your rubbish
- Joining a group that looks after your local areas for wildlife



Visits

Arrange visit from a local expert

Contact a local expert or your countryside ranger who would be happy to come in and talk to the children about red squirrels

Have a brainstorm with the children about the kinds of questions they could ask the ranger before they come – write these onto cards so children can ask them during the visit.



Scottish Natural Heritage
All of nature for all of Scotland

For further information and images

www.treesforlife.org.uk/tfl.scpine.html

www.saveoursquirrels.org.uk/red-squirrel-information/for-children

www.forestry.gov.uk

www.snh.org.uk/speciesactionframework

www.arkive.org/species/ARK/mammals/Sciurus_vulgaris/ (Red Squirrel images)

www.arkive.org/species/ARK/mammals/Sciurus_carolinensis/ (Grey squirrel images)

Acknowledgements

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Illustration: Iain Ashman and Merril MacWilliam
Photography: Neil McIntyre and Lorne Gill/SNH
Also many thanks to all those who helped in the development of this fact sheet, in particular the teachers involved in this project, Highland Council Ranger Service, and SNH specialists.

There is a poster to go with this factsheet and other posters and factsheets in the 'All About' series. Download the poster from www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/education/poster/p-redsquirrels.pdf or contact SNH, Battleby, Redgorton, Perth, PH1 3EW

Making a wildlife corner and feeding the squirrels

Put your feeder high up on a tree

Fill it with:

Hazelnuts in their shells, linseed, apples, peanuts, sunflower seeds, carrots

Do not put out:

Dried fruit such as raisins and sultanas as these can cause calcium deficiency in squirrels

In a quiet corner:

Leave a few logs to decompose to encourage insects and fungus for the squirrels to eat



All about Red Squirrels



Red squirrels have reddish brown fur, tufted ears and big bushy tails. They live in woods and forests and sometimes parks and gardens too. They need lots of trees and plenty of food!

What do red squirrels like to eat?

Red squirrels like tree seeds. They like seeds of trees with cones best. These trees are called **conifers** and as well as having cones they have needle-like leaves - the Scots pine tree is a **conifer**. They also eat acorns, beech nuts, hazel nuts, berries, mushrooms, tree bark, tree buds and flowers.

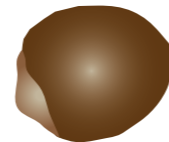
Squirrel Facts

1. Squirrels run down trees head first.
2. Squirrels **do not** hibernate (hibernate means sleeping all through the winter).
3. Squirrels have one to six babies. They weigh 10-15g at birth.
4. It is said that a squirrel can tell a good nut from a rotten nut by weighing it in its paws.

Supplies for the winter

In the Autumn there are lots of pine seeds to eat in the pine cones. They fall to the ground. As the year goes by mice and other small animals will find and eat the pine seeds. So squirrels spend some time on the ground in the Autumn, hiding away pine cones (and acorns, the seeds of oak trees - and other nuts too!). They scrape a hole in the ground and bury a cone or a few nuts. Then they pat soil and moss back over their hidden store.

Squirrels eat the nuts and seeds from these hidden stores, when there is less food in wintertime.





Will the 'reds' go?

There are very few red squirrels left in England and in Wales. The 'reds' have become fewer and the grey squirrels are there instead.

Will the same thing happen in Scotland over the next 10-20 years?



More Squirrel Facts

1. Owls and cats are predators of squirrels (A predator is an animal that gets its food by catching and eating other animals).
2. Squirrels usually run round to the other side of a tree trunk to hide from predators (if you spot a squirrel which then disappears try walking quickly around the tree trunk).
3. It is against the law to catch or hurt a red squirrel. It is also illegal to damage their nests.



Are there squirrels in a wood near you?

Look for look-out posts!

You might not see squirrels but you might see signs of squirrels. Look out for feeding sites where a squirrel can sit on a 'look-out' post to watch for predators while it feeds. Their look-out posts are surrounded by stripped pine cones.

Look out for dreys too (a drey is a squirrel's nest).



Squirrel nests, called dreys are made of twigs lined with a cosy ball of moss leaves and grass to keep the squirrel warm

Art - collage

- have the children look at the poster of the red squirrel, also pictures of native birds (eg chaffinch, siskin, Scottish crossbill, golden eagle, black grouse, capercaillie) and pine trees
- session/group 1 – paint a large pine tree on the classroom wall
- session/group 2 – paint individual pictures of squirrels which would be cut out and attached to the branches of the tree
- session/group 3 – paint pictures of pine-loving birds which would be cut out and attached to the tree

Writing activity

Ask the pupils to write a simple acrostic poem (using the first letter of each word). Have a brainstorm of words they could use first.

RED SQUIRRELS

Red squirrel are you there?
Eating your little store of nuts
Did you find enough for this winter?
Squirrel, squirrel with your long bushy tail
Quiet everyone and you will see...
Under the bushes and along the ground
In amongst the branches
Right up high in the tree, listen...
Rustle, gnawing
Eating the cones
Let's leave him in peace that beautiful Red



Talking and Drama

A day in the life of a red squirrel

Discuss with the children the "characters" a red squirrel might meet during the day – talk about

- the dangers from the grey squirrel
- where the squirrels live
- what they eat

ask the children to contribute verbally to a story about a day in the life of a red squirrel – use interactive whiteboard if available or pictures of the "characters" attached to sticks

Question and answer session

1. What is the name of the creature in the poster?
2. Describe this creature?
3. What does this creature eat?
4. How do they store their food?
5. Which animal are red squirrels in danger from?
6. Name two predators of squirrels.
7. What does the squirrel make its nest from?
8. Where did the grey squirrel first come from?
9. How many interesting squirrel facts do you know?
10. Can you name any of the birds who also like to live in the pine forest?



What a mistake!

Travellers often bring back souvenirs from their holidays. About 100 years ago (between 1876–1919) several different travellers brought back American grey squirrels with them. They thought it would be fun to have grey squirrels as well as red squirrels in their parks!

The grey squirrels spread out of the parks and gradually pushed out the red squirrels. Nobody is really quite sure how they do it. Perhaps it is because they are a little bit bigger and a little bit bolder. It may also be because they are better at digesting acorns and beech seeds. Red squirrels only seem to be able to live alongside grey squirrels if the trees are mainly conifer trees.