

Get ready to become a 'squirrel expert!' Read the following information carefully - you need to answer questions at the end to prove your squirrel expert credentials.



The Squirrel

The squirrel is one of the best known animals in Britain. It is a small **mammal** that can be found in trees and woodlands. Some squirrels live in cities, parks and gardens where there are plenty of places to hide and climb.

Squirrels are characterized by their bushy tails and great agility; they can leap from tree to tree and run along narrow branches. Squirrels can even run head first down a tree trunk leaping up to six metres and still land safely. Squirrels use their tails to help them to balance and their claws to grip the bark.

Squirrels are mainly plant eaters. They eat fruits, nuts, acorns and seeds but are also known to eat tree bark, buds, flowers, birds' eggs and even chicks! Squirrels have a strong sense of smell; they smell their

food before eating it to make sure it is good.

There are two different species of squirrel living in Britain; these are red squirrels and grey squirrels.

Enemies

In the woodland, squirrels have many predators including buzzards, pine martens and foxes. In the cities, squirrels are more likely to be caught by cats and dogs.

The main enemies of the grey squirrel are humans. Foresters trap and shoot them in order to protect the trees from damage caused by their gnawing.

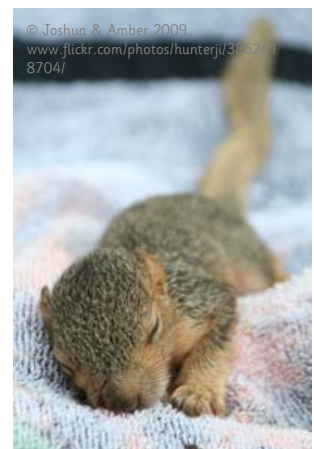
Reproduction

A female squirrel is pregnant for about six weeks. She gives birth up in a tree, in her nest called a drey. Young squirrels are called kittens and they feed off their mother's milk. A squirrel litter can contain between three and nine kittens.

Kittens are born deaf, blind and have no teeth or hair. They are completely dependent on their mother when they are born. The male squirrel does not help to rear the kittens.

Kittens stay in the drey for seven weeks. By this time, they have teeth and are ready to eat some solid food.

At four months old, the young squirrels are ready to leave their mother. They will go on to build their own dens or dreys. Sadly, up to 75% of kittens will not reach their first birthday. Some die from disease and others are killed by predators.



Grey squirrels



The grey squirrel was introduced into Britain about 130 years ago from North America. Nowadays, there are more grey squirrels than red squirrels across Britain. The grey squirrel outnumbers the red squirrel by 16 to 1!

Grey squirrels prefer to live closely together in deciduous woodland with oak and beech trees.



The grey squirrel has a bushier tail than the red squirrel and weighs more. Grey squirrels are mostly grey haired, but some are half red and half grey and some are even black!

Red squirrels



The red squirrel has lived in Britain for thousands of years. Red squirrels are found in Scotland, Wales and some parts of England.

Red squirrels like to live in coniferous forests of spruce and pine trees. Red squirrels like to spread out in the woodland, unlike the grey squirrels.



The red squirrel is smaller than the grey squirrel with a smaller tail. It has reddish-brown hair.



Name: Date:



Now you are a 'squirrel expert' try answering the following questions. Refer back to the information and give as much detail as you can.

1) What are the two different species of squirrel?

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2) Squirrels can use their bushy tails to keep warm and what else?

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3) What is another name for a squirrel's den?

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4) What evidence can you find to suggest that squirrels are agile?

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5) When was the grey squirrel introduced into Britain?

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6) What kind of woodland do grey squirrels prefer to live in?

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7) Which of the squirrels is larger, the red or the grey?

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8) Describe the appearance of a baby squirrel.

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9) How long do the young stay in the drey for?

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10) What part do the males play in rearing the young?

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11) How many kittens are estimated to reach their first birthday?

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12) What enemies do squirrels have? Who is their worst threat?

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13) What do squirrels like to eat?

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Create a glossary of the following words from the information pack.

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|------------|--|----------|--|
| drey | | forester | |
| mammal | | species | |
| coniferous | | kitten | |
| predator | | gnawing | |



Squirrels form part of a complex food web for woodland creatures. Draw a simple food chain for the squirrel including a single producer and predator.

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|-----------------------------|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| Draw images of your choices | Producer: what does a squirrel eat? | Consumer: in this chain is the squirrel | Predator: what eats squirrels? |
| | Name of producer: | Grey or red squirrel? | Name of predator: |
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Get out and about! Have a walk around your local area and see if you can find the trees which match these leaves. Draw a sketch of the tree or even better take a photograph and then stick them in!



Oak



Spruce



Beech



Pine