**The Grey Squirrel in Britain**

* **WHAT?** The North American grey squirrel
* **WHERE?** This species of squirrel was deliberately introduced in Britain and other parts of Europe

Figur Grey Squirrel

* **WHEN?** During the 19th Century
* **WHY?** It was released simply as a curiosity to satisfy the Victorian penchant for novelty but it is now so widespread with a population of over 2.5 million that many see it as a natural part of Britain’s wildlife.
* **CONSEQUENCES ?** The introduction of this mammal is having at least three major impacts on Britain’s native flora and fauna, which are not adapted to manage the grey squirrel’ presence.

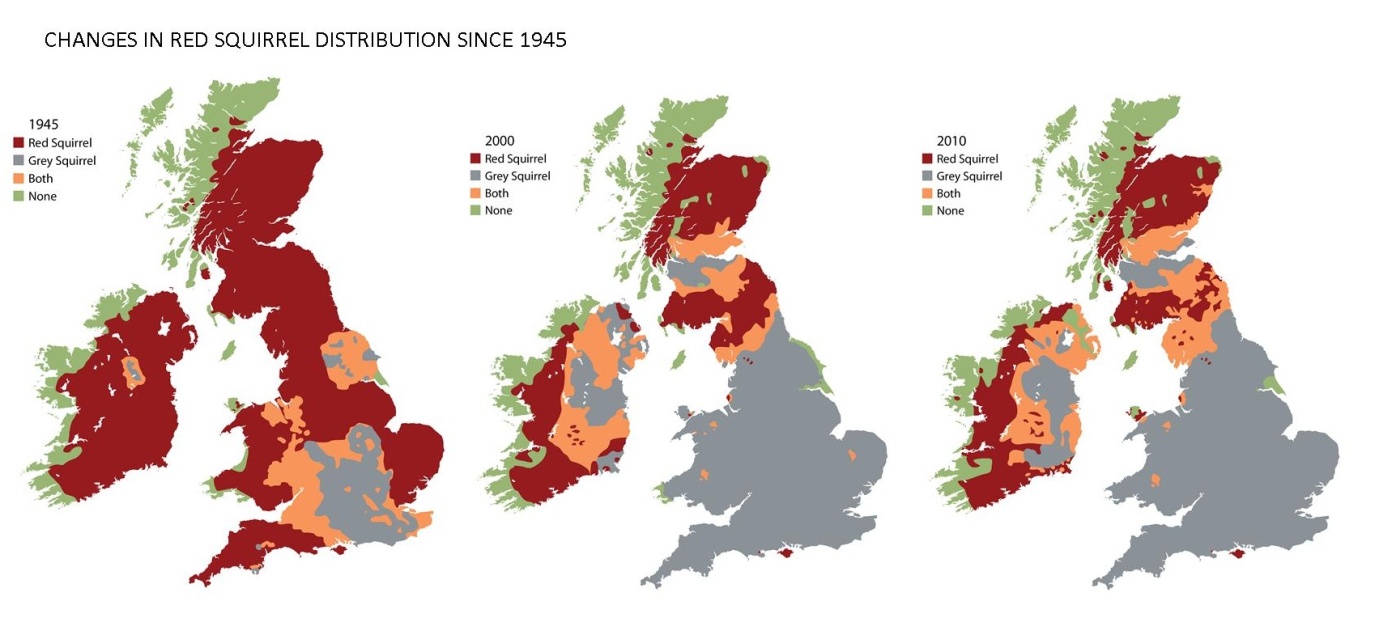
**Impact of grey squirrel on Red squirrels:**  
-One of the most significant consequences is that the grey squirrel has contributed to the decline of Britain’s native red squirrel but they are also responsible for causing significant damage to woodland as well as, woodland birds.  
- The decline of the red squirrel is because the grey squirrel is able to out-compete the red in almost every phase of their life cycle and it is also thought that the grey squirrel is more resistant to disease than the red.   
- It is clearly shown on the graph below that these two species cannot co-exist in the same environment. The grey squirrel has now spread to occupy almost all of Britain.  
  
**Impacts of Grey Squirrels on Trees:**  
- Grey squirrels, which live at high population densities in woodland, can cause significant damage to trees such as sycamore, beech, oak, sweet chestnut, pine, Norway spruce and larch, by bark-stripping   
- The activities of the grey squirrel results in the death of 5% of trees, and it dramatically reduces the economic and amenity value of woodland. In 2000 it was estimated that squirrel damage reduced the value of commercially grown trees in the UK by £10 million while also having a significant negative impact on the sustainable management and the amenity value of many woodlands.

Figure Red Squirrel

**Impacts of Grey Squirrels on Woodland Birds:**  
- There is evidence that grey squirrels may be partly responsible for recent declines in many woodland bird species. Due to the hunting of eggs, young chicks and, because they take over nest sites and consume food such as seeds and nuts.  
- There is evidence that in a Nottinghamshire wood grey squirrels were responsible for nesting failures in 27% of nest boxes.

* **SOLUTIONS?**   
  - Lethal control is governed by strict legal guidelines, but permission can be obtained to shoot, trap or poison grey squirrels to achieve the goals described previously. The Forestry Commission currently spends £200,000 per year controlling red squirrels.  
  - The use of poison is allowed however, this method is unappealing to the general public who have great affection for the grey squirrel. In addition, there is always the possibility of rodenticides having impacts on non-target species of British wildlife.  
  -Because of the reason above, non-lethal methods of control are now being developed, which make lethal control un-necessary. Perhaps the most interesting of these is the Forestry Commissions newly developed food hopper, which allows red squirrels to access supplementary food, while heavier greys fall out through a trapdoor in the floor and so cannot feed.  
  - Also, the red squirrel is still widespread in other areas of Europe so there is a possibility of re-introducing the red squirrel in British woodlands.

Figure Tawny Owl

* **CONCLUSION**: I agree that the spread of the grey squirrel has had detrimental effects on British fauna and flora but I think poisoning them might have other negative effects in the long run as the poison may affect other species of animals and plants. Furthermore, the re-introduction of the red squirrel might work but further studies must be done to ensure it will not have an even worse effect. As these red squirrels have been adapted to the habitat in other woodlands of Europe.