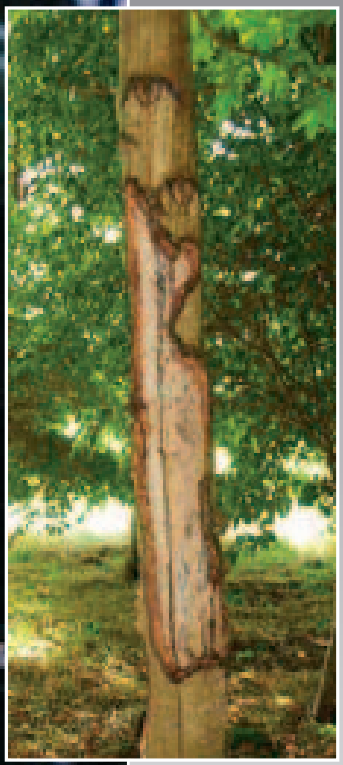
FARM FORESTRY SERIES NO. 8

GREY SQUIRREL DAMAGE OF BROADLEAVES



teagasc
AGRICULTURE AND FOOD DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Damage

The grey squirrel was introduced into Ireland in 1911. Since then, its spread has been steady and has contributed to the decline of the protected native red squirrel. The grey squirrel causes serious damage to broadleaf trees.

Grey squirrel damage can severely diminish the quality and value of a crop.

Grey squirrels strip the bark and feed on the sap. This damage may lead to timber discolouration, windsnap, disease, insect and fungal attack.

Damage can occur when the trees are between 6 and 40 years of age.

March to late June is the period when most damage is done.

Susceptible species:

Some tree species are more susceptible to damage (see Table 1). Sycamore, beech and maple should not be planted where squirrels are present.

Table 1: Susceptibility of tree species to grey squirrel damage

High Risk	Moderate Risk	Low Risk
beech	willows	horse chestnut
sycamore	alder	lime
maple	oak	conifers
	ash	
	birch	
	elm	

High-risk areas:

Grey squirrels usually live in dreys (nests), forks or hollows in trees. High-risk areas include young broadleaf trees close to older broadleaf trees.

Ivy provides ideal cover for grey squirrels

Grey squirrel drey

Management options

Reduce the woodland's susceptibility to damage

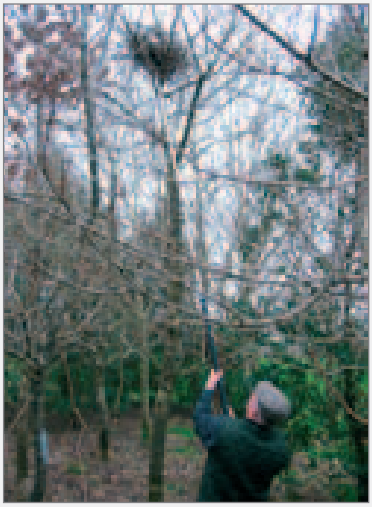
- Plant low-risk tree species (see table on previous page)
- Reduce the number of potential nesting sites
- Prune potential final crop trees early to make trees less accessible
- Remove all supplementary feeding, e.g. pheasant feeders

Scar damage on high-risk species

Prune lower branches to make trees less accessible

Monitor your crop regularly for signs of damage.

Control the number of squirrels within the forest area.



• Monitor broadleaf crops from year six onwards for damage.
There are three recognised methods of control:

1 Shooting

- Carried out in conjunction with drey poking.
- Shooting is a cheap method of control
- An intensive and sustained campaign is necessary on an annual basis to be fully effective.

2 Cage Trapping

- Cage traps are very selective and their use will ensure that only the targeted species (not red squirrel) is removed.
- Traps should be baited with nuts or sweetcorn and placed in areas where squirrel numbers are high.
- The daily inspection of traps is a legal requirement.

3 Baited Hoppers

- Hoppers are designed for the use of anticoagulant poisons e.g. Warfarin.
- Warfarin should only be used in specially designed hoppers and is generally mixed with whole wheat.
- Baited hoppers should not be used where red squirrels are present.

(Take adequate precautions when handling poisons)

In areas of high grey squirrel populations it is recommended that either one trap or hopper per hectare is used.

Summary:

- Assess the risk from grey squirrel before planting
- Avoid planting high-risk sites with broadleaves
- Co-operate with neighbouring landowners to maximise control
- Weigh up the cost of squirrel management against potential loss in timber value
- Commence control methods in February
- Protect the native red species

Our native red squirrel contributes to biodiversity and improves our forest ecosystems.

Control grey squirrel infestation to ensure the quality of your broadleaf woodland.

For further information, consult your Teagasc Forestry Adviser or the Forest Service.

Teagasc Agriculture and Food Development Authority
NDP National Development Plan
Forest Service
The Department of Agriculture & Food
An Roinn Talmhaíochta agus Bia

June 2005