

Squirrel damage threatens the health and viability of trees and woodlands

Since grey squirrel were first introduced to Britain around 100 years ago, populations have spread widely and rapidly. In many places, including most of England and Wales, they have displaced the native red squirrels.

Bark stripping damage usually starts at the end of April and continues until the end of July (early September in high risk years). Grey squirrels do not generally strip bark at other times of the year but winter stripping is not unheard of.

Trees can be stripped anywhere on the main stem and branches, with vigorously growing and dominant trees generally most affected. Damage levels vary between years and across sites within the same year.

Trees aged between 10 and 40 years are most vulnerable to damage.

Damage is recognised to be associated with high numbers of squirrels, especially juveniles entering the population in early summer.

Sycamore, hornbeam, willow, beech, pine, and larch are the species that are most at risk of squirrel damage.

£6-10 million:
The annual cost of grey squirrel damage to British forestry.



Damage can occur on conifers as well as broadleaved trees.

Up to 5% of damaged trees can die and many more will have degraded timber value through stem deformation, rot and broken tops. Oak, poplar, Scots pine and Norway spruce are particularly vulnerable to stem breakage.

Smaller diameter trees are more likely to be ring barked leading to higher tree mortality in these stands.

Fungal invasion at the damage site causes staining and rotting, reducing the value of timber. Callusing is common and disguises damage or staining present in the timber until the trees are felled.

There can be a reduction in annual increment of up to 2 yield classes, and damage to branches in the canopy may cause dieback, with timber yield being affected if 30% of the canopy is lost.

Trees under stress due to squirrel damage are more vulnerable to other pests and diseases.

Identifying Squirrel Damage To Trees: A Concise Guide





The top half of this birch tree has had bark stripped, the chips are visible on the track below.



Squirrel damage can happen in the canopy of a tree or at the base as on this Norway spruce.



Squirrels do not eat the bark and the chips are visible on the ground.



Squirrel damage on the canopy of this Sycamore is a sign of damage that can be spotted from a distance.



Squirrel damage can act as a potential inroute for disease.



Accumulated squirrel damage can be seen on the bark of this beech tree.



This tree has been almost ring-barked and is at risk of being killed.



The damage on this 12-year-old sweet chestnut is likely to mean the loss of a major part of the tree canopy.

Further advice on identifying squirrel damage, as well as managing squirrel populations, can be found online at [forestry.gov.uk/squirrel-damage](https://www.forestry.gov.uk/squirrel-damage)



The UK Squirrel Accord is about a common resolve for the control of grey squirrels and their impact on woodland

www.squirrelaccord.uk