

Red Squirrel

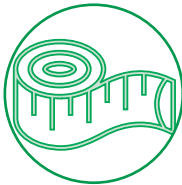
Habitat Hero



Common Name: Red Squirrel
Irish Name: Iora rua
Scientific Name: Sciurus vulgaris

Seen in Ireland:

Year-round
(they do not hibernate!)



The Red Squirrel can grow as tall as 25cm and its tail can grow 25cm long..



Red squirrels are now found in isolated, woodland habitats. They generally live in hollows of trees or will build a "drey". A drey is built from twigs, leaves and other materials. It looks like a large bird's nest but with a hole in the middle which the squirrel gets inside rather than sitting on top as a bird would.

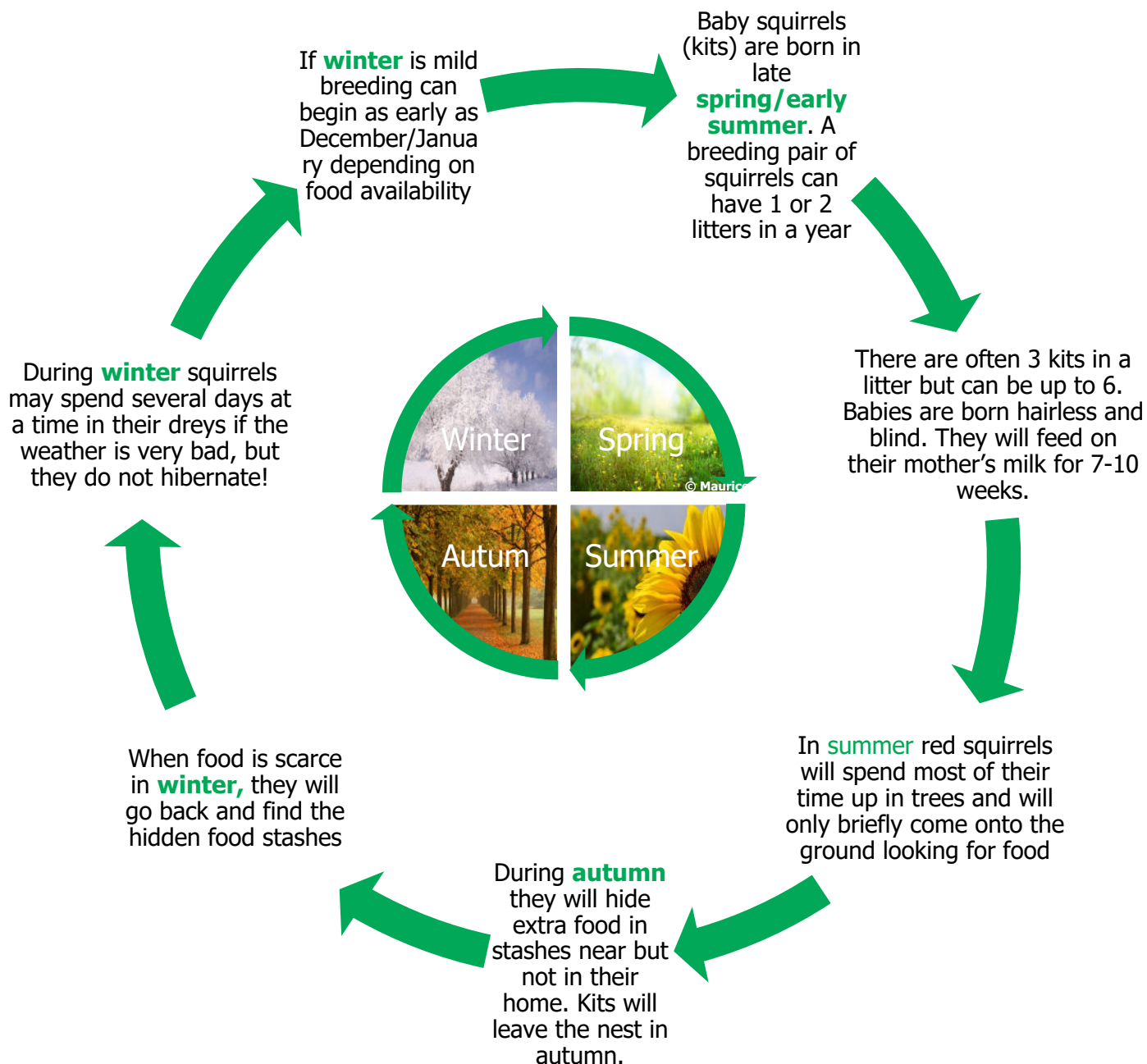


Red squirrels are herbivores. They feed on a variety of fruit and buds but mostly seeds and nuts such as pinecones, acorns, horse chestnuts and hazelnuts. They will often stash some extra food away during autumn so they can have some available for winter when food is scarce.



Red Squirrels can live for up to 6 years.

Red Squirrel Life Cycle



Red Squirrel

Some more Facts:

- Red squirrels are mostly reddish brown in colour with a white patch on their underbelly.
- They have a bushy tail, long pointy ears (with distinctive tufts of hair on top) and a triangular face.
- They are the only **native** squirrel in Ireland.
- The grey squirrel is the other member of the family. It is larger and grey or brownish in colour and was brought here from America.
- Did you know... red squirrels were once much more widespread in Ireland
- However, when grey squirrels were brought to Ireland about 100 years ago this led to the numbers of red squirrels dropping.
- This is not because the grey squirrels attack or eat the red squirrels but rather because the grey squirrels "outcompete" them.
- This means that when both live in the same place the grey squirrels are better at surviving there. Grey squirrels can eat a wide variety of food in many Irish woodlands. They spend more of their time gathering food.
- Grey squirrels are also able to eat certain seeds or nuts before they ripen, and red squirrels do not. While the red squirrels are waiting for these seeds to become ripe the grey squirrels may have eaten them all!
- Red squirrels are excellent at running across narrow branches and jumping across the tops of trees.
- They have long, sharp claws which help them to climb and grip and their long tails help them to keep their balance and avoid falling.
- Squirrels are sometimes called "nature's gardeners" because they accidentally plant trees/shrubs in their habitats. Most of the food they stash away for winter is seeds (acorns, horse chestnuts etc.) which they often hide by burying under the soil.
- If they forget where they put it this seed can grow into a new plant. This eventually helps the squirrel population as when the tree grows, they will have lots more of that food!
- Did you know... another reason for the drop in numbers of red squirrels in Ireland is the spread of squirrel pox. Grey squirrels "carry" this disease (not in a bag!).
- This means that the disease lives in their body but does not kill them. However red squirrels who live near a "carrier" can be infected (just like catching a cold) and will generally die from the disease.
- The pine marten is a natural predator of squirrels. However, it may actually be helping the red squirrel! Grey squirrels are more at risk of attack from pine martens and their presence can cause the numbers of grey squirrels to decrease leaving opportunities for red squirrels to take over!

