

## Grey Squirrel Trapping Protocol

This protocol is for members of the public who wish to control grey squirrels using live capture cage traps. Please record and report details/location of any greys killed to your local red squirrel conservation or grey control project. It is emphasised that we advocate the trapping and humane dispatch of grey squirrels as part of a wider management scheme.

### Trapping Details

Traps should be located either where grey squirrels have been sighted, or where evidence such as scratch marks and feeding signs are present, and usually on a level surface. Traps can be raised off the ground if they are being disturbed by other animals.

1. Once a suitable location has been established a secure flat base for the trap should be provided.
  2. The trap must be covered and habituated. Firstly wrap the trap with plastic sheeting to provide shelter. Next cover the entire trap (leaving only the entrance clear) with logs, branches and leaves. Place two sticks vertically in the ground at the trap entrance to prevent entry by non-target species such as pheasants.
  3. Pre-bait period. Pre-baiting of traps is necessary if you aim to consecutively trap greys from an established population: this aims to familiarise squirrels in the vicinity with the trap. To pre-bait a trap - secure the trap door permanently open with a piece of cane or stick slightly longer than the width of the trap, pushing through from one side to the other thus preventing the entrance door from closing, and bait the trap as described below for one to two weeks. Revisit the trap to replace food when necessary. The use of whole maize bait can determine if the bait is being taken by squirrels – squirrels are the only animals that will remove the soft germ of the maize, and discard the hard yellow kernel. Wood mice will chew and split the whole maize kernel.
- If trapping is aimed at a single/occasional squirrel, a pre-bait is unnecessary. The trap should be fully armed and baited immediately as the squirrel may not remain in the area for long.
4. After the pre-bait period you should commence trapping if there is evidence that squirrels are visiting the trap.
  5. Bait the back of the trap using whole maize, being careful not to obstruct the treadle. Other baits can be bird food, peanuts or hazel nuts in their shells, peanut butter or aniseed (Bird Puller). Place a small amount of food in the entrance to attract the squirrel into the trap.
  6. Once set, all traps must be visited twice daily, in the morning and again at dusk. Do not set traps if this cannot be done. In a period of absence, a disarmed trap can be locked in an open position and baited to ensure that it continues to attract squirrels.
  7. If a red squirrel has been accidentally caught simply release the animal immediately.
  8. If a grey squirrel has been caught it will be necessary to humanely kill the animal.

*Do not activate traps unless you can perform this task.*

**It is an offence to release a captured grey squirrel under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981.**

9. There are two recognised humane dispatch methods: shooting (single shot to the back of the head) or by cranial dispatch (using no more than two blows to the head). The wildlife trusts will not permit drowning, gassing or killing by any other means; this constitutes an offence under the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996.

Cranial dispatch is conducted as follows:

- Tie a Hessian sack tightly over the trap entrance taking care not to leave any gaps. Release the trap gate to allow the animal to move into the sack. At all times care should be taken not to handle the animal as there is a high risk of being scratched or bitten

- Once the squirrel has entered the sack, twist the sack closed to secure it
- Ensure that the squirrel is facing into one of the corners and place your foot to the side of the squirrel to hold it in position
- Once the head is located, it is vital that the squirrel is killed quickly and humanely. A single accurate blow to the back of the head with a heavy, blunt tool should be sufficient to kill the animal. Place the sack on hard flat ground, a stone or tree stump to ensure the blow is effective. A second blow should only be used after a few seconds if the animal is still moving vigorously. Repeated blows constitute an offence under the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996
- The dead grey squirrel should then be disposed of in a suitable manner; burying, incinerating, or securing in a plastic bag for normal refuse collection are acceptable.

**10.** The trap should then be removed, cleaned thoroughly and then disinfected. The disinfectant is most efficiently applied with a spray gun/bottle to provide a mist.

**11.** Finally, re-bait and set the trap. Traps should be removed and re-located if they fail to trap grey squirrels within two weeks.

**Important: If you are unable to check a trap for a period of over 12 hours, the trap MUST be disarmed**

### **Trapping in gardens**

Grey squirrels are often attracted to bird table and feeding stations in gardens, and may make regular visits. In this case, greys can be effectively trapped by removing the feed from the table/feeding station and baiting a trap located on the ground beneath. The trap can be baited with the same food that the squirrel has been feeding on from the bird feeding station.

Trapping should be conducted as described above. In this situation, the trap does not need to be habituated to such a degree, but should be properly covered with dark coloured plastic bags/ sheeting to provide shelter. A pre-bait period is unnecessary for trapping occasional squirrels.

If rodents are taking the bait, the trap can be raised off the floor so that the squirrels can enter but not the rodents.