

Activity 11

Greys v Reds Discussion Questions



Information about Reds and Greys

Two species of squirrels live in the UK today - red squirrels and grey squirrels.

There are 2.5 million grey squirrels and around 140,000 red squirrels.

Red squirrels have lived in the UK for around 10,000 years.

Grey squirrels were introduced from North America in 1876. Grey squirrels are often seen in parks and gardens and are familiar to many people.

Red squirrels are now limited to certain areas of the UK and are much rarer.

People care about their local squirrels - whether they are red or grey.

The red squirrel is in trouble and faces imminent extinction in some parts of the UK.

The grey squirrel is widely accepted as the main reason for the decline of the red squirrel over the past century. This is because:

- Grey squirrels compete with red squirrels for food and shelter and push them out to other areas.

- Grey squirrels carry the squirrelpox virus and transmit this to red squirrels. Once infected red squirrels die of starvation or dehydration over 1-2 weeks

Grey squirrels now occupy much of the UK but conservation management enables red squirrels to survive in some areas.

Discussion Questions

In areas of the UK where Grey Squirrels are found, some of the following ways of conserving red squirrels have been tried or considered. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the methods below.

- a) Humane killings of the grey squirrels by traps, and or shooting.
- b) The widespread use of rodenticide (Rodent killing) poisons.
- c) Use special feeders to feed the red squirrels but not the greys.
- d) Make sure that woods chosen to preserve the red squirrels have no hedges near them.
- e) Plant new woods made up of coniferous trees which only reds feed on, but not Sitka spruce, which greys feed on.
- f) The vaccination of red squirrels against squirrel pox disease.
- g) The use of drugs that stop the grey squirrels breeding.
- h) Why do you think it is important to preserve the red squirrel?