

**Brighton & Hove City Council**  
**Arboricultural Information Note No. 13**

**Damage by Grey Squirrels**  
*Sciurus carolinensis*



The Grey Squirrel is found throughout England, Wales and some areas of Scotland. It was introduced from North America on several occasions during the period 1876 to 1930 and in many of these areas has displaced the native Red Squirrel. The diet of the Grey Squirrel is extremely varied consisting of the buds, nuts, bark, berries, seeds, and fruit of many species of shrubs and trees.

Squirrels are known to collect large seeds and nuts and store these by burying them in the ground, relying on scent alone to retrieve these at a later time. A number of these are never found again and in this way they aid the spread of seed from the parent plant, ensuring the spread of new trees.



Grey Squirrels also cause damage to established trees by gnawing at the bark of usually thin-barked trees to get to the sweet layers beneath (Phloem Tissue). This tissue is responsible for moving sugars around the plant's system. If this feeding damage is so extensive and extends completely around a branch or stem, the flow of sugars will be halted and the stem or branch will eventually die. However, the removal of even some bark and associated tissue can restrict the growth of a tree and allow the entry of secondary infections through the wound that may affect the tree's health or stability.

Bark stripping occurs between April and early August to trees in the 10 to 40 years of age bracket with thin-barked deciduous trees such as Sycamore, Beech, and Oak, and coniferous species such as Pine, Spruce, and Larch being attacked regularly.

Some damaged trees will ultimately die and some will succumb to secondary fungal infections. Both may present problems to tree owners by making the tree or specific branches unsafe, requiring expensive tree surgery to resolve issues. In commercial plantations the loss of trees may have an immediate financial impact, while trees that are damaged may also become unsalable at some stage due to staining or other imperfections resulting from fungal or other pathogenic activity.