

The red squirrel is one of the most iconic native mammals in Northern Ireland and the red squirrel walk at Mount Stewart is one of the best places to see them in the wild.

Due to the spread of the non-native grey squirrel, red squirrels are becoming increasingly rare. The main reason for this is that grey squirrels carry a disease, parapox virus, to which they are immune but which usually kills red squirrels. Grey squirrels were introduced to Co. Longford in 1911 from North America and within 100 years this species has colonised much of Ireland.

Protecting the red squirrels at Mount Stewart

The National Trust is protecting the red squirrels by:

- Regular monitoring of the red squirrel population on the estate.
- Supplementary feeding through the provision of red squirrel food hoppers.
- Protection and management of their woodland habitat within the estate.
- Providing red squirrel warning signs to reduce road casualties on the estate.
- Leading on the Ards Red Squirrel Group.
- Using remote wildlife surveillance cameras to monitor behaviour of red squirrels within the estate.
- Analysing dead squirrels for the presence of the parapox virus, in conjunction with Queens University Belfast.
- Excluding grey squirrels from Mount Stewart and a surrounding buffer zone.



Conservation Status

Red squirrels are protected here under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Natural Environment (NI) Act 2011, and may not be intentionally trapped, killed or kept, or have their dreys disturbed.



How you can help:

- Please report any sightings of red and grey squirrels on the Ards Peninsula and North Down area by downloading a sightings form at www.nationaltrust.org.uk/mount-stewart/wildlife or alternatively e-mail us at: Strangford@nationaltrust.org.uk
- Come along to the annual red squirrel event at Mount Stewart as part of National Red Squirrel Week. For more details contact **Mount Stewart**.
- Get involved in the Ards Red Squirrel Group.
- **Please drive slowly within Mount Stewart estate – our red squirrels do not have much road sense!**

Further information:

Ards Red Squirrel Group:
Strangford@nationaltrust.org.uk



Northern Ireland Squirrel Forum: www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/biodiversity/northern_ireland_squirrel_forum

NI Red Squirrel Action Plan: www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/pubs/publications/UK_Stgy_Red_Squirrel_Conservati.pdf

Visiting Mount Stewart:

For information on opening times and admission prices to Mount Stewart, visit www.nationaltrust.org.uk/mount-stewart or contact: (028) 4278 8387.

Admission is free for National Trust members.



Mount Stewart, Portaferry Road, Newtownards, Co. Down, BT22 2AD.

Supported by: **Bombardier Aerospace (NI) Foundation**
Photo credits: **NT/Trevor Moffett/Chris Dyche**
Design: **Just Peachy Design**

The National Trust is an independent registered charity, number 205846



Mount Stewart Red Squirrel Walk



National Trust





Red Squirrel Facts

Recognition: Fur colour varies from bright ginger through to red and dark brown, or black tinged with grey in winter. They have larger ear tufts in mid-winter which disappear by the summer and a bushy tail which bleaches white by late summer in some individuals.

Size: 180-240mm, tail about 175mm.

Weight: Juveniles: 100-150g; Adults up to 350g.

Life span: They survive for up to six years in the wild.

Distribution and Habitat

Red squirrels spend about three-quarters of their active time above ground in trees and shrubs, and are at home in both conifer forests and broadleaved woodland. They are still relatively widespread in Ireland, but their range is reducing.



General Ecology

Behaviour

Red Squirrels are active throughout the year during the daytime, though in summer they may rest for an hour or two around mid-day. There is a common misconception that they hibernate in winter. This is not the case, although they may 'hole up' during severe weather. Squirrel nests, or dreys, are constructed with twigs in a tree fork or in a tree hole. They are lined with soft hair, moss and dried grass. Several squirrels may share the same drey, or use the same drey on different days.

Diet and Feeding

Their main foods are tree seeds, especially hazel nuts and seeds from conifer cones. They also eat tree flowers and shoots, mushrooms and fungi. They often suffer periods of food shortage, especially during July and in severe winters.

Reproduction

Breeding can begin in mid-winter and continue through the summer, depending on the weather and how much food is available. Mating chases occur where several males follow a female who is ready to mate. During chases squirrels make spectacular leaps through the tree canopy and spiral up and down tree trunks. Females have one or two litters a year, usually of about 2-3 young. Juveniles are weaned at around 10 weeks, but do not breed until they are one year old.

Red Squirrel Walk

