

SQUIRRELS

Squirrel is the common name for many rodents that belong to the same family as the woodchuck, chipmunk and prairie dog. Squirrels range in size from the pygmy squirrels of Africa, which are about 13cm long, to the giant squirrels of Asia, which are about 90cm long. Squirrels are found in all parts of the world except Australia.

Squirrels have sharp claws for climbing and a long bushy tail that helps them steer and keep their balance. Tree squirrels can leap up to 3 metres to reach one tree from another. Ground squirrels live in burrows under the ground.

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The Latin name for this squirrel is *Sciurus vulgaris*.

The head and body of this squirrel totals about 20-25cm in length, with the tail adding a further 15-20cm. The coat is a rich reddish-brown, with a white underside; reddish ear tufts are especially prominent in winter.

This squirrel is very active by day, becoming inactive during bad weather. It builds domed nests, known as *dreys*, usually in conifers, and feeds mainly on pine cones. It frequently visits gardens for scraps, sometimes becoming quite tame.

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The Latin name for this squirrel is *Sciurus carolinensis*.

This squirrel is slightly larger than the red squirrel. It is normally grey, but can have a rusty, reddish tinge. Its head and body length can be up to 30cm, the tail being up to 25cm.

It feeds on nuts, berries, roots, fungi and other vegetable matter; also insects, eggs, etc.

The grey squirrel was introduced into Britain from North America from 1876 to 1929, at about 30 separate sites. In most parts of Britain it is now more common than the indigenous red squirrel.

