

Natural England

Wildlife Management & Licensing



Licensing the release of non-native species and species listed in Schedule 9 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, with particular reference to the Grey Squirrel.

Invasive non-native species are considered the second most important threat to biodiversity worldwide, after habitat loss, and there are international legal obligations under the Bern Convention and the EU Habitats and Birds Directives to prevent or control their spread. These translate into domestic legislation in the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, which prohibits, except under licence, the release into the wild of any animal which is not ordinarily resident in, or a regular visitor to Great Britain in a wild state, or is listed in Part 1 of Schedule 9 of the Act.

Natural England is the licensing authority in England for the release of non-native or Schedule 9 species.

Some non-native species are already established in the wild and can have a detrimental impact on native wildlife or economic interests. It would be better if these had never been introduced in the first place and, where feasible, eradication should be considered. However, for some people, these species have become part of our wildlife and give a great deal of pleasure. Natural England therefore aims to strike a pragmatic balance between preventing or reducing the harm caused by non-native species and permitting limited releases of individual animals, for example after care and rehabilitation, where the potential impact of those individuals is negligible.

For some species, such as American mink, there is a strong presumption against allowing releases and licences will not normally be issued. For others, applications for licences will only be considered for re-release at the site of original capture, or within 1km of it if this is not possible or the precise location is unknown. Licences will only be issued for release within the established distribution of the species and may be refused if there is a risk to native wildlife, protected sites or property.

For muntjac and grey squirrels specific restrictions apply in order to discourage further spread and, in the case of grey squirrels, to prevent any additional threat to remaining red squirrel populations.

Natural England's aim is to prevent any releases that might have a real impact on our native wildlife. We believe that a successful outcome is most likely to be achieved by securing the cooperation of those who may release such species, such as wildlife rehabilitators and members of the public.

Additional restrictions that apply to Grey Squirrels

The red squirrel is not listed in the Habitats Directive but is, nonetheless, one of the UK's most threatened native mammals and is the subject of a Species Action Plan and considerable conservation effort. To avoid adding to the threat that grey squirrels pose for remaining red squirrel populations licences to release grey squirrels will not be issued in counties or areas where red squirrels are, or may be, still present.

Licences to release grey squirrels should not be issued for **Northumberland, Cumbria or Durham**, the districts of **Gateshead, Newcastle upon Tyne, North and South Tyneside and Sunderland**, the districts of **Richmondshire and Craven (North Yorkshire)**, the districts of **Sefton, Liverpool, Knowsley and St Helens (Merseyside), Halton and Warrington (Cheshire), Wigan (Greater Manchester), Lancaster and West Lancashire** and **islands in Poole Harbour or the Isle of Wight**. In addition, red squirrels may still survive in Thetford Forest and possibly (though unlikely) in Hope Forest in the Peak District. Although they are probably effectively extinct in these areas, no licences should be issued to release grey squirrels within the **northern half of the Peak District National Park, north of the A6**, or within the **Thetford Forest area**, that is the **districts of Breckland (Norfolk), Forest Heath (Suffolk) and St Edmundsbury (Suffolk)**.

Outside of the above proscribed areas, licences will normally only be issued for re-release of rehabilitated animals, which were originally taken from the wild for tending or treatment, or for immediate release of individuals at the same location from physical entrapment, such as squirrels entangled in wire netting. Squirrels released following rehabilitation must be released at, or within 1 kilometre of, their point of capture. Applications for other purposes, such as research, will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Reports of unlicensed releases or licence breaches are taken seriously and may be passed to the Police or considered for enforcement action by Natural England, as appropriate.

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