Grey Squirrel Trapping Guidelines

This guidance is for members of the public who wish to control grey squirrels using live capture cage traps. Please record and report details/location of any greys killed to the Red Squirrels Northern England (RSNE) project.
It is emphasised that RSNE advocates the trapping and humane dispatch of grey squirrels to provide positive benefit to red squirrel conservation.
Further information on grey control and trapping is available from the RSNE Conservation Officer.

Trapping Details

Traps should be located either where grey squirrels have been sighted, or where evidence such as scratch marks and feeding signs are present, and usually on a level surface at the base of a mature tree. Traps can be raised off the ground by a foot or so if they are being disturbed by non-target species such as pheasants or badgers.

1. Once a suitable location has been established the ground should be levelled off to provide a secure flat base for the trap.
2. The trap must now be covered and habituated. Firstly cover the trap with cardboard or plastic sheeting to provide shelter. Next cover the trap (being careful not to obstruct the entrance) with logs, branches and leaves; rocks can be placed on top to help secure the trap if necessary. Stones can be placed around the entrance to disguise it. Grey squirrels are inquisitive and more likely to venture into a well-disguised trap. Place two sticks vertically in the ground at the trap entrance to prevent entry by non-target species such as pheasants, but be careful not to inhibit the gate closure.
3. Pre-bait period: Pre-baiting of traps is necessary if you aim to consecutively trap greys from an established population; this aims to familiarise squirrels in the vicinity with the trap. To pre-bait a trap, secure the trap door permanently open with some wire and bait the trap as described below for five days. Revisit the trap to replace food when necessary. The use of whole maize bait can determine if the bait is being taken by squirrels – squirrels are the only animals that will remove the soft germ of the maize, and discard the hard yellow kernel. Wood mice will chew and split the whole maize kernel.

   If trapping is aimed at a single/occasional squirrel, a pre-bait period is unnecessary. The trap should be fully armed and baited straight away as the squirrel may not remain in the area for long.
4. After the pre-bait period you should commence trapping if there is evidence that squirrels are visiting the trap.
5. Bait the back of the trap using whole maize, being careful not to obstruct the treadle (other bait such as peanuts or hazel nuts in their shells can be used if necessary). Place a small amount of food in the entrance to attract the squirrel into the trap.
6. Once set, all traps must be visited twice daily, first thing in the morning and again at dusk**. Do not set traps if this cannot be done.** In a period of absence, a disarmed trap can be locked in an open position and baited to ensure that it continues to attract squirrels.
7. If a red squirrel or other non-target species has been accidentally caught, simply release the animal. If traps are regularly catching red squirrels, you will need to modify your trapping regime.
8. If a grey squirrel has been caught it will be necessary to humanely kill the animal. It is an offence release a captured grey squirrel under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.
9. There are two recognised humane dispatch methods; the animal should be killed as quickly and humanely as possible by either cranial dispatch, or by shooting in the trap. RSNE will not permit

drowning, gassing or killing by any other means; this constitutes an offence under the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996.

NB. Shooting in the trap should only be carried out with an airgun (adhering to relevant UK air weapon laws). Combs can be inserted through the trap to restrict the animals' movement. Do not follow the animal with the gun. Instead either allow the animal to settle down and remain still before taking the shot, or focus the gun on a given corner of the trap, and wait for the animal to move into range – the squirrel will work its way around the corners trying to escape.

NB. Cranial dispatch is conducted as follows:

- Place a Hessian sack tightly over the trap entrance taking care not to leave any gaps. Release the trap gate to allow the animal to move into the trap. At all times care should be taken not to handle the animal as there is a high risk of being scratched or bitten; thick leather work gloves will help avoid this.
- Once the squirrel has entered the sack, twist the sack closed to secure it.
- Ensure that the squirrel is facing into one of the corners and place your foot to the side of the squirrel to hold it in position.
- Once the head is located, it is vital that the squirrel is killed as quickly and humanely as possible. Blows should be made to the back of the head with a solid implement such as a fishing priest. Place the sack on hard flat ground, a stone or tree stump to ensure the blow is effective.
- The dead grey squirrel should then be disposed of in a suitable manner.

10. If blood is spilt in the trap, the trap should be removed and cleaned thoroughly with boiling water, then disinfected with a suitable disinfectant such as Virkon S or Trigene. The disinfectant is most efficiently applied with a spray gun/bottle to provide a mist. RSNE Rangers spray disinfectant onto the traps every time a grey squirrel is caught to minimise the risk of squirrelpox virus transmission.
11. Finally, re-bait and set the trap. Traps should be removed and re-located if they fail to trap grey squirrels within two weeks. It is important to remember that the likelihood of catching a squirrel at any one site may vary throughout the year. Previously unsuccessful areas should be returned to occasionally to see if greys are present.

Trapping in Gardens

Grey squirrels are often attracted to bird tables and feeding stations in gardens, and may make regular visits. In this case, greys can be effectively trapped by removing the feed from the table/feeding station, and instead used to bait a trap located on the ground beneath. The trap can be baited with the same food that the squirrel has been feeding on from the bird feeding station.

Trapping should be conducted as described above. In this situation, the trap does not need to be habituated to such a degree, but should be properly covered with black plastic bags/sheeting to provide shelter. A pre-bait period is unnecessary for trapping occasional squirrels.

Suppliers

Reliable traps can be purchased from www.trapman.co.uk and whole maize bait is available from most agricultural suppliers.