



Red Squirrel



Latin Name: *Sciurus vulgaris*

Appearance:

Red Squirrels have a typical head to body length of 19 to 23 cm, a tail length of 15 to 20 cm and a mass of 250 to 340 g. It is thought that the long tail helps the squirrel to balance and steer when jumping from tree to tree and running along branches and may keep the animal warm during sleep.

The lifespan of the Red Squirrel is on average three years, although individuals may reach seven years of age, and 10 in captivity. Survival is positively related to availability of autumn winter tree seeds, on average, 75 to 85% of juveniles disappear during their first winter, and mortality is approximately 50% for winters following the first.

Habit:

The active period for the Red Squirrel is in the morning and late afternoon-evening. They often rest in their nests in the middle of the day, avoiding the heat and the high visibility to birds of prey that are dangers during these hours. During the winter, this mid-day rest is often much more brief, or absent entirely, although harsh weather may cause the animal to stay in its nest for up to days at a time.

Diet:

Red Squirrels eat mostly the seeds of trees, neatly stripping conifer cones to get at the seeds within. Between 60% and 80% of active period may be spent foraging and feeding. Excess food is put into caches, either buried or in nooks or holes in trees and eaten when food is scarce. Red Squirrels do not remember where they created caches; they have to search for them when in need, and many caches are never found again. No territories are maintained, and the feeding areas of individuals overlap considerably.

Reproduction:

Mating can occur in late winter during February and March and in summer between June and July. Up to two litters a year per female are possible. Each litter usually contains three or four young. The young are looked after by the mother alone, and are born helpless, blind and deaf and weigh between 10 to 15 g. The juvenile Red Squirrel can eat solids around 40 days following birth and from that point can leave the nest on their own to find food.