



Red Squirrel Games and Activities for Children (Big and Small!)

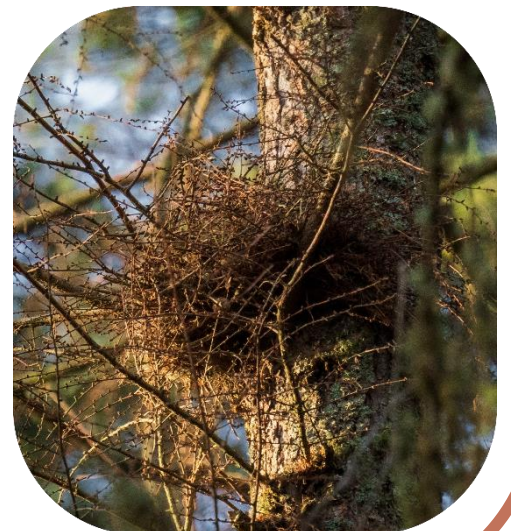
Trees for Life



Build a drey

Fun fact! Squirrels build nests in trees, called dreys. Dreys are ball-shaped nests made of twigs and leaves, and lined with fur, feather and leaves for warmth. They are usually built close to a tree trunk, but if they have young, they will build them away from the trunk on thinner branches which pine martens are too heavy to cross.

Using natural materials like sticks, leaves and grasses, can you make a squirrel drey in a nearby tree? You can introduce a competitive element by testing them for stability and waterproofing.





Nut cache game

Fun fact! Squirrels in the UK do not hibernate, so they have to find a way to survive the cold winters where food is scarce. One way they do this is by storing – or caching – their food in holes in trees and burying it in the ground, then digging it back up when they need to eat. Of course, they don't dig it all back up again, so some of the tree seeds germinate and grow into new trees, making squirrels excellent forest engineers!

Hide 5-10 hazelnuts or pine cones each around your garden, school grounds or local park. Do something else for a few hours then come back and see how many you can find! Think about different caching strategies. If you hide all your nuts in one place they're easier to remember, but also easier for other squirrels to find and eat!



Squirrel Olympics

Fun fact! Squirrels are amazing arboreal acrobats. They even have double jointed ankles so they can turn their back feet around when coming down tree trunks. Their tails are useful for helping them keep warm but they also help them to balance.

Create an adventure course using natural materials!

You could include:

- High jumps over logs and tree stumps
- Log beam balancing
- Log seat hopping
- Relay race with natural objects or squirrel toys
- Zig zag race through an avenue of trees
- Pine cone throwing
- Shimmy or crawl under low branches
- Woodland obstacle race

You can make trophies and medals or even crowns for the winners from leaves, petals or feathers.

Predators and Prey

Fun fact! Red squirrels' predators include foxes, birds of prey and pine martens. Pine martens are the only animal that can chase squirrels through the trees, but luckily red squirrels are smaller and lighter than pine martens so they run along thin fragile branches and leap to nearby trees so the pine martens cannot follow them.

Choose at least one person to be a pine marten; everyone else is a squirrel. There are at least two ways to play this game:

1. The pine marten must stand facing a wall or tree. The squirrels must sneak up on the pine marten without being heard. If the pine marten hears a noise they turn around and the squirrels must freeze. If the pine marten sees anyone moving they call out their name and that squirrel is out.
2. The pine marten sits in the centre, blindfolded, guarding a set of keys or other noisy item. The squirrels must sneak up and try to retrieve this item. If the pine marten hears and points at anyone, that person is out of the game.



Cave Art / Natural Pigments



Fun fact! Red squirrels are known for their striking russet-coloured coat, but did you know their hair colour varies according to location, season, and age? Some red squirrels might look more grey, black, or even blonde! Squirrel tails can 'bleach' to a lighter colour in sunlight, just like human hair, and adults tend to have lighter hair than juveniles (young). They almost always have a white underside, however, which combined with the natural shades of their fur helps them to be camouflaged.

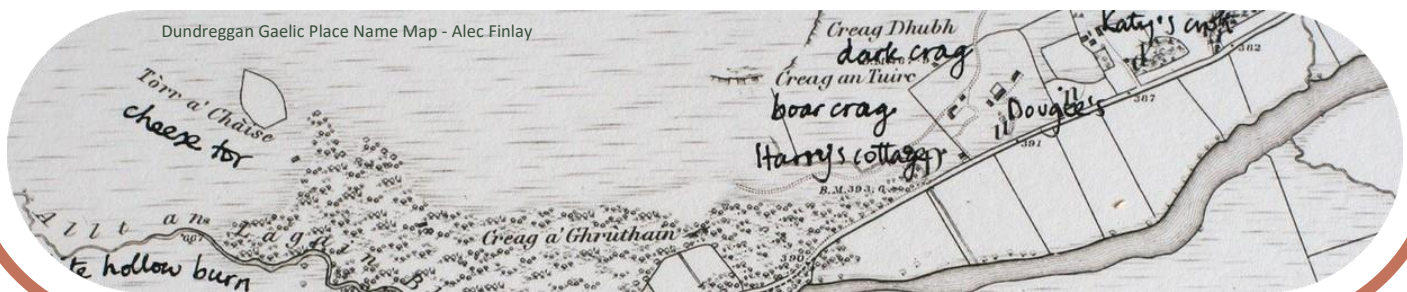
Using natural materials, make natural paints and see how many squirrel shades you can recreate! You can use fingers and hands, or make brushes from natural materials. Try things like feathers, fluffy seeds, grass seed-heads and animal hair tied to sticks for paintbrushes. For natural paints you can collect different kinds of soil, charcoal, berries, leaves and bark, Make sure natural materials are collected sustainably – don't take too much and make sure there's enough left for animals. Paint on paper, walls, tree trunks, or stones. You could even create a 'cave painting' on a big piece of paper to decorate your wall or classroom!

Feòragan - Squirrels

Fun fact! Place names often have interesting stories behind them, and some place names can be very old, linking back to linking back to past forms of livelihood in the environment, and to characters and events in mythology and history. In Scotland, Gaelic is an indigenous language, having been spoken for hundreds of years. This is evident in many place names. Gaelic place names are often related to plant and animal species that are (or were) found nearby, or are connected to Gaelic mythology. The Gaelic for squirrel is feòrag, and red squirrel is feòrag-ruadh (fyORR-ak ROO-ugh).

Take a look at some maps of Scotland, can you find any place names with feòrag, feòraig or feòraige in them? Look up some Gaelic words for different animals, plants and natural features like streams, hills and mountains. Try to translate some of the place names you find on your map – what do the Gaelic names tell you about the places? Can you find any old maps to compare with modern ones?

For example, a lot of Gaelic place names mention forests, or certain tree types – often where no forests exist today. This tells us that when the places were named, there was possibly forest there. The same may be true for animals like wildcats and wolves!



Squirrels in mythology

Fun fact! In Irish mythology, the goddess Medb had a squirrel on one shoulder who served as her messenger to the earth. In Norse mythology, a squirrel called Ratatoskr ran up and down the World Tree, Yggdrasil, taking messages between the serpent in its roots and the eagle in its branches. In the ancient Sanskrit epic poem the Ramayana, a squirrel helps Rama to build a bridge to rescue his wife, Sita. More recently squirrels have featured in books like Beatrix Potter's Squirrel Nutkin.

In cultures around the world they have been portrayed in many different ways: as either greedy or thrifty for their caching of nuts in the autumn, as the carriers of gossip or insults, as vermin for their occasional damage to trees and as the planters of new trees when they leave some of their cache to germinate.

How many different stories of squirrels can you think of? What do you think they are like – greedy, thrifty, clever, forgetful, tricksters, helpers? Create your own squirrel character and write a story or poem about them.



Nutty Maths



Fun fact! Red squirrels need to eat about 18g of food per day, or about 5% of their bodyweight.

Create some squirrel-themed maths problems. For example:

What is 5% of your own bodyweight, and how does this compare to the amount of food you eat in a day?

Sammy squirrel loves hazelnuts, but only 10% of his habitat is hazel trees! If 8 trees are hazel trees, how many are other trees?

Sylvia Squirrel has collected lots of food for the winter. For every hazelnut she has collected, she has 9 pine nuts. She has 11 hazelnuts. How many pine nuts does she have?

Bags of nuts, pebbles or tokens can be used to aid in counting. Younger children can sort nuts and tokens into categories based on things like shape or size.

Squirrel Scavenger Hunt

Fun fact! Red squirrels are opportunistic feeders. This means they have a really varied diet. As well as tree nuts and seeds like pine, spruce, larch, hazel, oak and beech, they also eat mushrooms, berries such as blackberries, rowan berries and blaeberrys, lichens, flowers and even bird eggs and young birds!



Go for a walk in your local park or woodland, or even your garden or school grounds. How many of the squirrel foods listed above can you find? How many of them are edible for humans too? Please don't eat anything you find on your scavenger hunt unless you are absolutely sure it's safe.

Can you also spot some squirrel feeding sign? The picture to the left is a stripped spruce cone. Check out our guide to identifying squirrel feeding sign and see if you can find any evidence of squirrels in your area!

If you see any red, or grey, squirrels, you can log your sightings at www.scottishsquirrels.org.uk to help conservation organisations to look after red squirrels!

Wildlife Corridors



Fun fact! Red squirrels are forest animals, and spend most of their time above ground in the trees. They spend much less time than grey squirrels foraging or travelling along the ground, which helps them to avoid predators such as foxes. This also means that they don't like to travel far across open ground. Deforestation and habitat fragmentation have caused populations of red squirrels to become isolated, which in turn has effects on genetic diversity and breeding success. Green corridors – hedgerows and areas of connectivity between woodlands – are vital to ensuring the survival of red squirrels.

A twist on the well-known game 'the floor is lava'. Can you move across your living room, garden, park, woodland or school grounds without stepping on the floor? Think about what you could use as stepping stones or balance beams!

Thanks for reading, we hope you enjoy these activities! Be sure to take a look at our website where you'll find more resources and lots of information about our different projects and the flora and fauna of the Caledonian Forest.

You can also find updates, photos and videos on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube!

Trees for L^yfe

Rewilding the Scottish Highlands
Ath-fhiadhachadh na Gàidhealtachd