

EC-SQUARE: Controlling Grey squirrels for the conservation of the European red squirrel

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Invasive alien species can constitute a serious threat to biodiversity, causing the decline or even the extinction of many native species. A well-documented case of an alien species threatening species of the native fauna, and potentially ecosystem functioning, is the wide scale replacement of the native Eurasian red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*) by the introduced eastern grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) in the British Isles and parts of northern Italy. The rapid increase of the distribution range of grey squirrel, coincided with a dramatic decline of the range of the native red squirrel, and the grey squirrel has now replaced the red squirrel over much of its range in Britain and in Northwest Italy. Whereas, the presence of grey squirrels in Great Britain, being on islands, is a national problem, its spreading populations in northern Italy are a problem for the entire European continent, since from

Italy the alien species is predicted to colonise surrounding countries, in first instance France and Switzerland.

Within EC-SQUARE, a European funded project, we will develop methods to remove grey squirrels in different socio-ecological contexts. This will be integrated with societal assessments to investigate and shape public perceptions of the general problematic posed by alien species and in particular in the case of the grey squirrel. Developing and carrying out specific control methods linked to local public perception of the alien species will allow us to test the efficacy of innovative methods under different local contexts and to introduce new strategies to manage alien species which will be made available to policy makers at different administrative levels.