

[News story: March 2019 update: Invasive non-native species and grey squirrels](#)

A plan to tighten rules around releasing invasive non-native animals which threaten our native wildlife will come into effect in October 2019, the Government today (1 March) confirmed.

Invasive species cost the economy an estimated £1.7 billion per year. One of the best-known is the grey squirrel, which threatens our native red squirrel and causes significant damage to forestry in the UK.

The Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order 2019 that the Government will lay before Parliament at the beginning of March represents no change to the keeping of grey squirrels in UK law.

There is no requirement on vets to euthanise any injured or healthy squirrels that are brought into rescue centres.

It has been illegal to import and keep these animals under existing British legislation dating from 1937. These actions will remain illegal under the Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order in line with the [EU Regulation \(1143/2014\) on invasive alien \(non-native\) species](#) and domestic policy.

Under the [Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981](#) it is also currently an offence to release grey squirrels without a licence. The Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order will mean that [Natural England](#) will no longer issue release licences for grey squirrels.

Biosecurity Minister Lord Gardiner said:

Invasive non-native species, including the grey squirrel, not only challenge the survival of our rarest species but damage some of our most sensitive ecosystems, costing the economy more than £1.7 billion per year.

This order prevents the release of these animals back into the wild to help protect the endangered red squirrel, with only 15,000 left in England. There is no requirement for vets to euthanise injured or healthy squirrels as a result of this order.

This move will bring England into line with established policies in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, where release licences are not issued.

The Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order will come into effect during October 2019.

Under the EU Regulation, it is a requirement for management measures to be put in place for widespread invasive species. There will be an upcoming period of consultation on the Government's proposed management measures for these species.

To allow for this period of consultation, keeping and release licences issued by Natural England will be extended until the Order comes into force in October 2019.

The UK will continue to uphold international obligations as an EU member state and also as a responsible partner nation working closely with other countries to protect our native wildlife and forestry landscapes for future generations to enjoy.

The Government has a long-term strategy to help control grey squirrel populations where they are identified as a specific threat to forestry or to existing populations of red squirrels. The Grey Squirrel action plan is published [online](#).

Any companion animal of a listed species – that was kept before it was included on the EU list – may continue to be kept in secure accommodation, as long as it is not able to breed until the end of its natural life.