

THE GREY SQUIRREL ON THE ISLAND OF BUTE

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There has been an important addition to the mammal check-list for the Island of Bute (Gibson 1970, 1990) - the Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*. Indeed this is the first genuine record of the Grey Squirrel for any Clyde island.

On 17th September 1994 Mr. John Mitchell and his wife, while motoring south from Rothesay to Kilchattan Bay, had a brief but close view of a single Grey Squirrel running across the main road (A844) towards Torr Wood (NS 097593). As is well known, Mr Mitchell has been Senior Warden of the Loch Lomond National Nature Reserve, in the heart of Grey Squirrel country, for nearly thirty years and well knows the Grey Squirrel, so there is no doubt about the identification.

Although Grey Squirrels can swim well, it is extremely unlikely that the squirrel could have reached Bute from the Argyll mainland by this means. Grey Squirrels, especially young ones, are very attractive creatures which are often kept as pets, but are later released when they become difficult to handle or it is realised that it is illegal to keep one without a licence. This seems to be the most likely explanation for the occurrence, but extensive local enquires have revealed no further information or additional sightings.

It is obviously extremely important, however, that the situation be carefully monitored, so I shall be most grateful to receive any confidential information.

References

- Gibson, J A, 1970 The Mammals of the Island of Bute. *Transactions of the Buteshire Natural History Society*, 18 (1970): 5-20.
- Gibson, J A, 1990 Some recent notes on Bute Mammals. *Transactions of the Buteshire Natural History Society*, 23 (1990) 65-79.