

The Squirrel Game

Probably the most popular activity from the last 25 years of RFS Teaching Trees, the “Squirrel Game” is a quick, visual way of showing children the impact that over population of an animal species can have on the health of a woodland.

Age: 4 - 11 year olds

Minimum time needed: 10 minutes

Curriculum links:

Science

- How do plants grow?
- How do animals obtain their food?
- What impact do non-native species have on eco-systems?

Resources

- A way of indicating which child / children are the “grey squirrel”
- 4 different coloured cards or objects such as bean bags

How to Play

1. Ask your group what a tree needs to grow from a seed into a mature tree. Depending on the age of your group, choose answers such as water, carbon dioxide, soil and sunlight. Allocate each of these things one colour of cards e.g. water blue, sunlight yellow, and then put all four colours of cards or objects out into piles in the hall or the field.
2. Tell your group that they are all seeds and they will need to collect one of each of the four things to grow into a tree. When they have collected four different colours they can form a tree pose to show they have completed the task.
3. Once they have understood what a tree needs to grow, repeat the game but with one child as a squirrel. If the squirrel tags the child before they have collected all four colours then they are not able to grow into a mature tree and they are out. When everyone is either a tree or out, count the number of trees. What impact did the squirrel have on the game?
4. Repeat the game but this time, the squirrel has had babies and now there are four or five squirrels. What difference does this have on how many trees grow in your forest? What would happen if the number of squirrels kept increasing?

Background: Grey squirrels are a non-native species. First introduced to this country in the Victorian era, they have now caused the death of the majority of our native red squirrels through Squirrel Pox. They are also responsible for damaging or killing 15% of England and Wales’ broadleaf trees each year.