

MOST UNWANTED!

What is the difference between Native and Non-Native Species?

When the ice began to melt 10,000 years ago, following the last Ice Age, animals and plants migrated over landbridges from the rest of Europe. As the sea levels rose, Ireland was soon cut off and the species of animals and plants that then existed here became known as **native species**. Some of these species, such as the giant Irish deer and the wolf, died out over time, but others survived. Today, species native to Ireland include badger, hedgehog, red deer, otter, Irish oak, birch, hazel, elm, dandelion, buttercup, bluebells and foxglove, to name but a few! When man arrived in Ireland, he started to bring with him animals and plants from other parts of the world. Many of these species have since become established here and are known as **non-native species**. This list is long but includes sycamore, alder, fuchsia, mink, grey squirrels and brown rats. Many of these non-native species have lived happily alongside our native species, however that is not the case for all of them.

INVASIVE SPECIES

Since people began travelling around the world, they have intentionally or accidentally brought non-native species with them to other countries. These species are now travelling further than they would naturally travel, often finding themselves in environments in which they are able to thrive. With few natural enemies and little else to stop them reproducing over and over again, they sometimes take over their new environments. Eventually, if they are not stopped, they can totally dominate large areas, destroying habitats that are really important for native species, and sometimes destroying the native species themselves. These species are known as **invasive species**. In Ireland, there are a number of organisations working together to help identify and locate these invasive species, as well as finding ways to limit their impact. The four species below are just a sample of the invasive species threatening Ireland's native species:



Courtesy of Benny Mazur, CC-A 3.0 Unported

AMERICAN GREY SQUIRREL

ORIGIN: North America. Six pairs were brought from England and released in Co. Longford in 1911.
FIRST IRISH RECORD: 1911
FOUND: Prefers mature woodlands, but also found in urban and rural areas.
IMPACT: Threatens the native Red Squirrel as they out-compete them. Can damage woodlands.



RHODODENDRON

ORIGIN: Native to Europe and Asia (Spain & Turkey) and came to Ireland as a garden plant.
FIRST IRISH RECORD: Not known
FOUND: Found in gardens and forests throughout Ireland.
IMPACT: Rhododendron form dense growth, making it hard for native plants to grow. Also produces toxins which are poisonous to herbivores.



Courtesy of Robbie Murphy

JAPANESE KNOTWEED

ORIGIN: Asia
FIRST IRISH RECORD: Not known
FOUND: Along watercourses, transport routes and waste ground.
IMPACT: Has no natural enemies. A strong, rapidly growing plant that outcompetes native plants. Causes damage to tarmac and concrete and can act as a barrier in the movement of wildlife.



Courtesy of USGS

ZEBRA MUSSELS

ORIGIN: Spread from the Caspian Sea into Europe in 17th century. Thought to have come into Ireland from the UK or the Netherlands on boats.
FIRST IRISH RECORD: 1997
FOUND: Marine habitats, in many northern and western freshwater systems in Ireland.
IMPACT: Eating food of native species, changing native ecosystems, blocking water intake pipes and boat motors.