

Research: Gray squirrel at risk in Britain

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The gray squirrel population throughout Britain could soon be dominated by a mutant squirrel species whose numbers are dramatically rising, researchers say.

Researchers in Cambridge, England, said their findings indicate the population growth of the black squirrel could endanger the country's gray squirrel population down the road, The Daily Telegraph reported Saturday.

"The population is expanding across the region and is spreading further every year," said geneticist Helen McRobie, who conducted the study on black squirrels at Anglia Ruskin University. "They could overrun most of the eastern counties within 10 years."

The black squirrels represent a genetic mutation of gray squirrels, but they reportedly are more aggressive and territorial than their gray kin due to increased testosterone levels.

Life sciences professor Alison Thomas said black squirrels were first discovered in 1912 and until recent years had remained at a moderate population. But she warned the rodents' numbers are now on the rise and the gray squirrel could soon be overrun.

"There has been a population boom and they are due to overtake the gray squirrel population in some parts of the country," she told the Telegraph.

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