

Press Release

For immediate release: 10 September 2010

Yesterday's unwanted pet, tomorrow's invader – Chipmunk spotted in Waterford Woods

Experts identified another potentially invasive non-native species in the Waterford area during August 2010. A Chipmunk (most likely the Siberian Chipmunk) was photographed crossing a road near Dungarvan by a vigilant member of the public. This grainy photograph has alarmed experts at Invasive Species Ireland, the National Biodiversity Data Centre and the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Their concern is not unwarranted. The Siberian chipmunk, characterised by 5 longitudinal black stripes along its back, could be another competitor to the red squirrel which is already suffering because of the introduction of the invasive non-native grey squirrel. Both species have similar habitats and food requirement. Siberian chipmunks may also have negative impact on ground nesting bird species.

This species is not only of concern to conservationists. Research from France has shown that in the wild, Siberian chipmunks can harbour ticks. In suitable suburban habitats, this may increase the risks of transmission of tick borne diseases such as lymes disease.

While we have not seen significant economic impacts associated with this species in Europe to date, in its native Russia, Siberian chipmunk is known to destroy up to half the forest nut production, and cause great damage to grain crops and potentially in gardens and orchards. The potential for economic impacts here in Ireland is unknown.

Over the past number of years there has been a growing concern about the potential problems pets can have on our native species when they become invasive. Colette O' Flynn, manager of the National Invasive Species Database reports that "during 2009 and 2010, we have seen a number of species associated with the pet trade end up in the wild in Ireland" and adds "that early detection and reporting of such species in the wild to the Data Centre is imperative if the battle to avert their spread and harm is to be successful". John Kelly from Invasive Species Ireland said "Government is acting to implement restrictions on non-native species that can threaten our native wildlife, economy and human health. However, each citizen must take responsibility in protection Ireland's valuable biodiversity"

The National Parks and Wildlife Service in Ireland encourages responsible pet ownership and trading. As part of this, we are working to promote responsible pet ownership and or trading. Pet owners and traders should remember that it is illegal to release any non-native species into the wild in Ireland without a license. Often, it is cruel to release a pet into the wild. They can be ill-equipped to deal with living in the wild resulting in unnecessary stress. Pet owners should be responsible for the animals they keep. Mr. Kelly advises "If you no longer want your pet, try to take it back to the pet store you purchased it from or talk to your vet for advice. Always research an animal before you take possession of it."

Siberian chipmunks do not make ideal pets. They can escape easily and are difficult to contain.

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Notes for Editors

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Notes to Editor:

The **Invasive Species Ireland** project is a joint venture between the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

The Invasive Species Ireland project aims to substantially reduce the impact of invasive species on Irish biodiversity, to contribute to halting the biodiversity loss by 2010 and beyond; and to minimise economic and social costs caused by invasive species.

Through partnership working, the vision for Invasive Species Ireland is that the island of Ireland will have a high performing system for managing invasive species risks to the economy, environment and human health. The project is working with stakeholders, partners, and the people of Ireland and Northern Ireland to develop an understanding of, and confidence in the systems required to achieve effective prevention and management of invasive species.

For more information on the Invasive Species Ireland project see www.invasivespeciesireland.com

The **National Invasive Species Database** provides up-to-date centralised information on the distribution of invasive species in Ireland. It answers the questions: What invasive species do we have in Ireland? Where exactly are they? The database has been developed as a resource to assist recording, monitoring and surveillance programmes, and provides the infrastructure for development of an early warning system for invasive species.

The associated website: <http://invasives.biodiversityireland.ie> is a portal to the searchable database that is linked to interactive GIS distribution maps with full record information on invasive species sightings. The website also contains Species Alerts that are issued when confirmed sightings of potentially invasive species arrive in Ireland, database up-dates, an Invasive Species Survey where people are urged to report sightings of eight of Ireland's most unwanted invasive plants and record submission facility.

The National Invasive Species Database is joint funded by The Heritage Council and The Environmental Protection Agency and was established by the National Biodiversity Data Centre in 2008.