

GREY SQUIRREL

(*Sciurus carolinensis*)

Back in the 1800s, grey squirrels were all the rage among the British upper class who deliberately released them on estates up and down the country. Liberated from natural predators, such as raccoons, skunks and large forest hawks, these North American rodents have since spent a century spreading north in a grey tide. Today, the British population, which stands at 2.5 million, bosses suburban bird-feeders the length of the country. The New World invader has also been accused of devastating forests and snuffing out the red squirrel, its gentler, home-grown counterpart. The grey squirrels don't directly attack the native, but multiply faster and carry the squirrelpox virus, which kills it in droves. Since 2009, the Cornwall Red Squirrel Project has been working to eradicate grey squirrels from the Lizard, and one day hopes to breed and release red squirrels back into the wild.

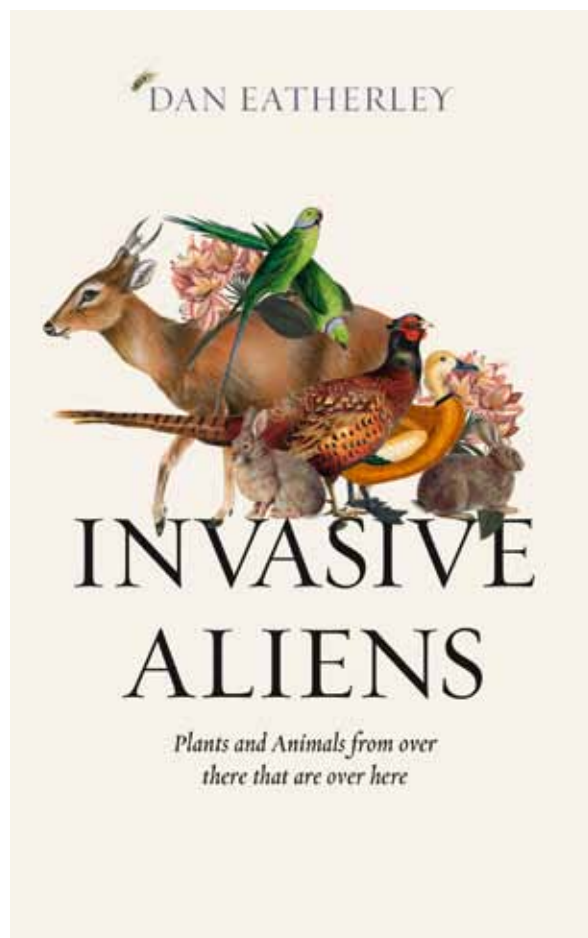
LANDHOPPER

(*Arcitalitrus sylvaticus*)

Also known as lawn shrimps, landhoppers are a type of Australian amphipod crustacean – a terrestrial version of the native beach-hoppers we find by the seaside – that were first noticed during the 1920s jumping about in moist humus and dead leaves in the gardens of Tresco Abbey on the Scilly Isles. No one knows for sure how these shiny little black invertebrates got there, but it's likely they stowed away aboard trees, shrubs and herbs collected from New South Wales and Queensland to satisfy the growing demand among British gardeners for southern hemisphere plants. Several other species of landhopper have turned up in heated tropical glasshouses, but so far only the Tresco variety has proved tough enough to survive outdoors in the UK. They're now found in isolated populations, typically parks and ornamental gardens, across southern Britain and Ireland. Landhoppers are capable of spreading under their own steam, covering up to 40 metres a night, but their patchy distribution suggests they will hitch a ride where they can. Are landhoppers

Alien invasion

Sometimes by accident, sometimes by intent, numerous animal and plantlife have been seduced by the mild and wild environs of Cornwall. In his latest book author Dan Eatherley charts the rise and fall of some of the species that have been a little too successful...



a problem? A study in an Irish pine forest calculated that landhoppers consumed a quarter of all leaf litter – so there's a real possibility they're supplanting native detritivores.

PACIFIC OYSTER

Native to Japan, China and other parts of north east Asia, the Pacific oyster today accounts for around 85 per cent of all oysters cultivated in Britain. Commercial exploitation of its European counterpart, the flat oyster, dates back at least to Roman times

but over-harvesting and river dredging triggered a catastrophic decline. During the 1960s British oyster-farmers turned to the exotic species, sourcing stock from Canada, where Pacific oysters had been cultivated since the beginning of the 20th century. Experts assumed that the colder British waters would prevent the introduced oysters from forming self-sustaining populations; the experts were wrong, and today, wild colonies are well established off southern Britain, where great reefs



Photo: Getty/StevenCBill

a property sends mortgage lenders running for the hills. The root systems, which reputedly grow several metres a month, are accused of undermining foundations, blocking drains and pushing through solid concrete. In Cornwall, the ‘knotweed problem’ was identified as early as the 1930s, when houses in the east of the county reputedly lost £100 in value due to an infestation in their gardens.

HIMALAYAN BALSAM (*Impatiens glandulifera*)

Invariably ranking high on lists of Europe’s worst invasive plants, the Himalayan balsam is sometimes known as Jumping Jacks or Stinky Pops, referring to the facility with which its seed pods, when ripe, detonate at the slightest disturbance – be it a drop of rain or the flick of a child’s finger – spraying their contents far and wide. The species was first brought to Britain from its native foothills in Nepal, India and Pakistan in the late 1830s. By 1890, Himalayan balsam – which attains heights of two metres or more – was spreading at a rate of 645sq km every year. The balsam was also helped by the nation’s beekeepers, appreciative of its lengthy flowering season and abundance of nectar, who deliberately planted it close to their apiaries. Shooting up on prime waterfront early in the growing season, the balsam shades out perennial natives, while monopolising insect pollinators with its irresistible summer-long bonanza of nectar. At the end of the season it promptly dies off, leaving an empty bank which, in the absence of the stabilising roots of the displaced perennials, washes away in the first major flood of the winter, the released silts choking fish eggs and aquatic invertebrates. Since 2014 Cornwall has been among a number of sites in the UK where field trials with a rust fungus brought from Asia attack the balsam to bring it under control. ♦

Dan Eatherley is an environmental consultant and author of *Invasive Aliens: Plants and Animals From Over There That Are Over Here* (William Collins, RRP £16.99)

In Cornwall, the ‘knotweed problem’ was identified as early as the 1930s, when houses in the east of the county reputedly lost £100 in value due to an infestation in their gardens



Photo: Getty/RuudKorff

sometimes form with 200 or more individuals per square metre. Oyster hatcheries try to contain the spread by producing triploids: animals with an extra set of chromosomes which, in theory, are sterile. But the approach hasn’t been a roaring success: triploids are alleged to have escaped and begun reproducing. Some environmentalists have resorted to legal action to shut down oyster farms while others, armed with hammers and power-drills, go out at low tide to have a crack at the shells.

JAPANESE KNOTWEED (*Fallopia japonica*)

During the 1840s, Philipp von Siebold, a Bavarian naturalist, collected knotweed from Japan’s volcanic slopes for his nursery in the Netherlands. Soon afterwards the plant’s fast-growing bamboo-like stems, heart-shaped leaves and spikes of creamy-white blossom were enrapturing gardeners on this side of the English Channel. These days – much like dry rot, asbestos or mundic – the discovery of a single knotweed plant on

TOP: A plant of the invasive alien, Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) in flower

ABOVE: Close-up of pink flowering Policeman’s Helmet or *Impatiens glandulifera* plants in their natural habitat