

# 'Aliens' take up residence in balmy South West



> The grey squirrel, above, is not solely culpable for red squirrels' decline, argues Dan Eatherley, author of *Invasive Aliens* (below)

**T**HE aliens are coming to the UK, and they are coming to Devon and Cornwall first.

The region is in the front line for invasive species, according to a new book by a naturalist and environmentalist.

A mild climate and proximity to mainland Europe mean the region is often where non-native species first gain a foothold in Britain, says Dan Eatherley,

Asian hornets, which are a threat to honey bees, are only the latest in a huge number of invaders to have been found first in the South West, he says, with sightings in North Devon and Cornwall.

"It is probably a case of a female flying over and over-wintering here," said Mr Eatherley, a writer based in Exeter who has made documentaries with Sir David Attenborough.

While some invaders such as the signal crayfish and Himalayan balsam have created problems in waterways and the likes of Japanese knotweed have caused problems on land, not all of the newcomers pose as much as a threat as many believe.

Others such as daffodil and snowdrops have become cherished. Nor is it even straight-forward to identify which species are native or alien. "Most species were wiped out in the last Ice Age, so everything that has come in since is 'alien,'" said Mr Eatherley. "Many have 'hitch-hiked' on plants brought in for gardeners."

Victorian-era plant-hunters who brought new plants into the South West played a big role. The Treseder nursery at Moresk in Truro was responsible for bringing in exotic ferns and the ubiquitous Torbay palm, and some tiny creatures who came along for the ride.

Flatworms and landhoppers - flea-like creatures often spotted when leaf litter is disturbed - hitched a ride on Treseder shipments. Landhoppers were first spotted in the gardens of

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Tresco Abbey on the Isles of Scilly and are now found across southern England and Ireland. They are voracious feeders and there is a "real possibility" that they are out-competing and supplanting native species, said Mr Eatherley.

Other species were brought in deliberately as pest controllers, to dine on problem species, and have gone on to cause problems themselves. Harlequin ladybirds, native of Asia, were brought to France and other countries to tackle the problem of aphids but have gone on to eat native ladybirds, to mutate and to fly across the Channel.

The grey squirrel is one of the best-known invaders brought over for novelty value. They are blamed for a drop in the number of native red squirrels, partly because they carry a virus to which they are immune but which the British residents are not.

"The reasons for the red squirrels' decline are more complicated, partly due to the loss of trees cut down for the First World War effort," he said. "In the UK, red squirrels are actually at the edge of their range."

*Invasive Aliens* will be published by HarperCollins in July



# Volunteer with rescue group dies after collapsing at Ten Tors event

A volunteer has died after collapsing at Ten Tors on Sunday.

Pauline Richards, Dartmoor Search and Rescue team's longest serving member, passed away on Monday at Derriford Hospital after collapsing while on duty at Ten Tors on Sunday.

Dartmoor Search and Rescue Team, Ashburton took to their Facebook page to break the sad news.

The post read: "We are sorry to

report that yesterday we heard that one our longest serving team members Pauline Richards passed away at Derriford hospital.

"Pauline was on active duty on Sunday at the Ten Tors event when she had a sudden collapse and was airlifted to hospital. Our thoughts and best wishes are with her family and friends."

Pauline's career in search and rescue covers the better part of three decades.

She was a keen supporter and member of SARDA for many years and was a handler with her dog Rags.

Pauline always pitched in to the running of the team and had served on our team committee as well as holding team member and support team member roles.

The post went on to say: "We are going to miss her commitment, humour and friendship more than we can say."

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