

THE SQUIRREL SCOOP

INCORPORATING RED BUSH TELEGRAPH

Newsletter for Saving
Autumn 2012 Scotland's Red Squirrels



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The latest arrival at Muirhead Red Squirrel Sanctuary. Bramble was found in Inverness and rescued by the SSPCA.



Carry On Squirrelling

SSRS is awarded core funding for two more years

Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels is delighted to announce that thanks to the generosity of supporters including Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland and the Red Squirrel Survival Trust, as well as donations from members of the public – the project is set to continue for another two years if we can find the last block of money to bring us up to our total.

In March, SNH awarded us £350,000 of the total of £1million needed for SSRS Phase 2. With Scottish Wildlife Trust fundraisers on the case, we have already brought in the greater part of the shortfall, but we still have £190,000 to find in order to take us through to April 2014.

An important development for Phase 2 is Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels' merger with the long-running 'Red Squirrels in South Scotland' project to become a single strategic national project under the SSRS banner. We will now be

running news from the south in our newsletter, and the more observant among you will have noticed that our title now includes the Red Bush Telegraph, the name of Red Squirrels in South Scotland's newsletter. This merger will bring more streamlined project management and efficiencies in handling all the data generated by the two projects.

South Scotland's Lead Project Officer, Karen Ramoo, introduces the work in the south on page 4.

Over the last three years the project has built up alliances with farmers, estate owners, gamekeepers and the public to work in concert with our own grey squirrel control team to create a Red Squirrel Protection Network in Aberdeenshire and in a band across the Central Lowlands. There is a similar network across South Scotland. We have also developed survey techniques to help us assess the effects of the Network's grey squirrel control with some promising results. Data already

collected has given us early indications that consistent, carefully-targeted trapping of grey squirrels can be an effective way to reduce competition and free up habitat for reds to return. But we need data from a longer period to be confident that our early successes can be sustained. Our aim for the next two years is to gather the required information to enable us to create a long-term squirrel management plan that will safeguard the future of red squirrels in Scotland.

Given the current threat from grey squirrels that are spreading out from Italy to threaten reds throughout Europe, what we learn in the next two years may prove vital for future of the species worldwide.

If you would like more information on surveying and other ways to get involved drop us an email at: Squirrels@swt.org.uk or see www.scottishsquirrels.org.uk. To report your squirrel sightings, visit www.scottishwildlifetrust/reportsquirrel



A leucistic white squirrel enjoys a snack from a bird feeder.
Photo: Lorna Allison



A melanistic grey squirrel

The Black and White Squirrel Show

This amazing picture of a snow white squirrel was taken near Comrie in the spring. This is the second year that it has been spotted and by the striking ear tufts it is clearly a *Sciurus vulgaris*.

When it visited one of our feeder boxes it left a white hair sample, which, curiously, turned out to be a very pale, translucent pink when viewed under the microscope.

It is an example of a leucistic squirrel, which is distinguishable from an albino squirrel by the fact that it has black eyes, as opposed to pink. White red squirrels are fairly rare and this is one of only two reported in Tayside.

Astonishingly, a black squirrel was also spotted in the same area in the same year, this time a grey squirrel. Others have been reported from a number of Scottish locations including Springfield, Dundee and Kilmarnock. Black squirrels'

genes are missing a piece and so produce only black hairs. They have been making the news recently as a population of black grey squirrels in Cambridgeshire has begun to be seen in large numbers. They will happily breed with regular grey squirrels to produce a "brown-black" squirrel but if two blacks breed they will always produce a black squirrel as the altered gene is dominant. This explains why some neighbourhoods have seen normal greys almost disappear. Over the decades they have been spotted further afield and researchers have been studying their movements to find out more about UK black squirrels (see

www.blacksquirrelproject.org/)

If you spot any unusual squirrels, black or white, let us know at:

<http://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/reportsquirrels>

Squirrels on Film

Feeder box hair-traps are good tools for letting us know if red or grey squirrels are in an area but they are labour-intensive and only tell part of the story. To capture a clearer picture of what is going on among the trees when the project officers' footsteps have faded, we are investigating motion sensitive cameras. Fixed opposite a feeder box, they are tripped when any creature pays a visit.

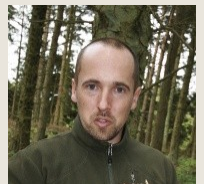
Along with an image, times and dates are recorded as well as the species of creature that is enjoying a free lunch - pine martens, polecats and woodmice also enjoy peanuts! It may even be possible to identify some individual squirrels to give an estimate of a minimum number in the neighbourhood.

By visiting the cameras three times over six weeks in spring and autumn to collect the memory cards, a large bank of information will be available for study. The Project will gather details of squirrel activities helping us to determine where and when to trap and the effect of trapping on subsequent visitors. As demonstrated in the picture to the right, recent tests have been successful and have made us eager to embrace technology in our efforts to protect red squirrels.



New Faces

SSRS has welcomed some new members to the team in recent months. In Aberdeen and Moray, **Steve Willis** took over from Annabel Harrison in May. Readers in Aberdeenshire may remember Steve from his involvement in trapping and surveying for the project over the winter of 2010-11, and from his role as Squirrel Project Officer before the national project was established. Prior to that he set up the Ayrshire Squirrel Group while a Ranger at Culzean Castle. Through his previous squirrel-related work and work with the Cairngorms Water Vole Project, Stephen is already a familiar face to local estates and conservation bodies.



Heinz Traut is the new project officer for Southwest Scotland. He joins us from Red Squirrels in Northern England, bringing with him a BSc in conservation and forest ecosystems, experience as a ranger involved in managing a number of nature reserves in Wales and, much further afield, management of an estate in South Africa's Kruger National Park. "I am very pleased to be part of the SSRS team and delighted to have a part to play in the conservation of such an iconic species."



Spring Survey Signals Success

In Phase Two of SSRS, we will be reducing our survey effort to one set of tetrad surveys in the spring over most of the project areas. This is because our main interest is the year-to-year change in the predominance of the two squirrel species rather than seasonal changes. Having said this, it is interesting to compare the 2012 Spring Survey results with the two seasonal surveys of 2011 - spring and autumn.

Between spring and autumn of 2011, the tetrads showed distinct changes in favour of red squirrels, mainly due to the loss of grey squirrels from tetrads where both species were present in the spring. Spring 2012's tetrads continued this trend. Quite a substantial change benefiting red squirrels had taken place since the situation a year back, but even in the shorter period since autumn the overall change was in the reds' favour. Unfortunately for the statistically minded, the Spring 2011 sample size was too small for these changes to be significant.

In looking at the results in more detail, we detected a distinct recovery of grey squirrels between last autumn and this spring in 9 tetrads where they had been removed during summer 2011. Squirrel biology tells us that this pattern of over-winter recovery of range is fairly predictable. Young squirrels born in the summer become independent in about October (the month after our autumn surveys) and need to disperse from their mother's home range to find new and vacant woodland.

Fortunately this biology also holds for red squirrels, and over the same period, we saw 15 tetrads gaining red squirrels. In addition, in 8 tetrads where both had been present in autumn we found *only reds* this spring. This is an excellent result for reds and suggests that in the areas where the project is actively working, the tide is turning in their favour.

What is clear is that we cannot relax the pressure on grey squirrels, as they will re-colonise only too readily. The challenge for all of us is how do we sustain enough pressure to hold off grey squirrels in the long-term? We shall welcome any contributions to this debate during Phase 2.

We are tremendously grateful for all those who gave up their time to be involved in the surveys: being able to demonstrate success is essential for the future of the project. We will be extending the tetrad surveys into South Scotland next spring, where we hope for similar volunteer support.

If you wish to see a copy of the survey report, please contact your regional Project Officer or download it from the Monitoring Success page on our website: www.scottishsquirrels.org.uk.

Red Squirrel Hotspot: Templeton Woods

Templeton Woods by Dundee is fast becoming one of best places to spot red squirrels in Tayside. On the north western fringe of the city, the woods have been managed for several years to keep grey squirrels under control. The reward for this effort has been a steady growth in the red population.

Squirrel feeders placed near the main walking route are serviced by a local volunteer. They are regularly visited by hungry red squirrels and offer plenty of opportunities for keen photographers to capture their antics.

Visitors are provided with a range of marked walks through the woods including an all-access path that is popular with wheelchair-using wildlife fans. Squirrel spotters are best to try the Blue Route along which the trees are often busy with bustling red squirrels in the early morning.

There is also a visitor centre, colourfully decorated by a local artist, where maps and information can be found to help enjoy the visit.



*Templeton Woods Visitor Centre
Picture : Brian Tasker*

Directions: On entering Dundee from the east or west travel along the Kingsway until the Coupar Angus junction. Follow the signs to Birkhill and turn right onto Templeton Road just before the village. At the top of the hill turn right into the car park.

**For events and activities contact:
Dundee Countryside Ranger Service
01382 431848**



South of Scotland News

Project Officer Karen Ramoo brings us up to date on what is going on below the Central Belt.



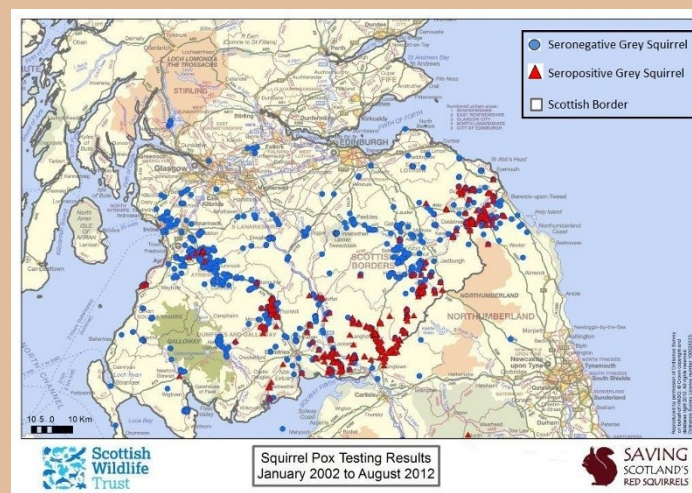
The Project in the south has been through a period of change this last year. In addition to the recent merge with the SSRS Project, the south also welcomes new Project Officer Heinz Traut who will cover Dumfries, Galloway and Ayrshire.

South Scotland will continue to work strategically as the first line of defence in detecting and containing outbreaks of the squirrelpox virus - carried by greys and deadly to reds – and in halting the northward spread of infected grey squirrels into the Central Belt and beyond. In a cross-border effort to protect the reds, SSRS South will also coordinate with the team behind the Red Squirrels in Northern England (RSNE) project which has now begun landscape-scale grey squirrel control over the border.

There has however been some unfortunate news in terms of the distribution of seropositive (pox-carrying) grey squirrels, with new incidences detected in Duns, Ayton and Lauder in the Scottish Borders and near New Galloway in Dumfries and Galloway. The spread of the virus in the south-east follows the loss of red squirrels to the disease at Paxton House Estate in December 2011, though evidence of spread to other local red squirrel populations has not yet come to light. Locals across the south are being asked to keep a vigilant eye on the health of their red squirrels as well as staying on the lookout for grey squirrels.

SSRS South now has four grey squirrel control officers, with our newest officer joining the team in January 2012. He is working along the Whiteadder and Blackadder Waters in Berwickshire where he has been busy recruiting local landowners to help him clear the area of seropositive grey squirrels. The good news is that after only a few months of intensive work, red squirrels have been sighted in new areas suggesting the pressure from grey squirrels is already being reduced; however efforts in this area must continue if we are to safeguard Scotland's red squirrels.

Although the threat of squirrelpox has increased over the past year (see map below), the Project remains optimistic about the future and feels it is in the best position ever to tackle the northward spread of the squirrelpox virus.



In areas where there is a well established network of grey squirrel control (volunteers, landowners and professional controllers) we are beginning to see maintained reductions in grey squirrel numbers and the welcome return of red squirrels to areas including east Ayrshire, parts of the Tweed Valley and Berwickshire. Thank you to everyone who has supported the work in the south - together we really are making a difference to securing a future for the red squirrel and the outlook is looking red.....

Reporting Goes High Tech!

The rise and rise of the smartphone might just be able to help us Save Scotland's Red Squirrels! Ever growing numbers of people are now sporting various different phones with all sorts of web capabilities and access to a myriad of 'apps'. One very useful feature of these phones is that they can scan things like bar codes. They can also scan QR codes- those funny looking pixelated squares you see on adverts. With a simple (usually free) app you can scan all sorts of things that will link you a website.



Steve Willis, Project Officer in the Northeast found it was easy to generate a code for the sightings page of the SWT website. This odd little square is now on all the new sightings posters across Aberdeenshire!

We hope that by embracing this exciting new technology we can maybe get a few more records. If you can scan a poster in the woodland where you make your sightings it's easier to report it straight away and it will avoid the 'I must mind and report that squirrel.....' factor! So if you have a smartphone handy give it a whirl!

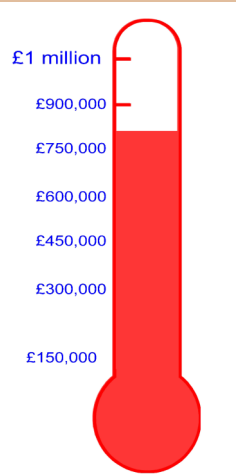


Our thanks go to wildlife artist and animal portraitist Steve Bretel who has donated this original watercolour of a cheeky red squirrel munching on a pine cone to SSRS for auction to help raise project funds. Scoop readers are invited to join in the bidding by contacting whill@swt.org.uk

"It was a real pleasure to try and capture the lively nature of this well-loved Scottish wildlife icon", he said.

See more of his work at: <http://animalvisual.co.uk/>

Help us to raise our final £190 K



SSRS needs to reach the £1m target that will take Phase 2 through to 2014. If you can help us to get there by making a donation to support our efforts to protect red squirrels for the future, please use the link below to visit the SWT website and click the red squirrel button. <https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/donate/donate-now/stage1>

Photo: Art Sangster



The 2012 round of SRDP submissions came to a total of 18 for Tayside, 4 for Argyll & Trossachs and 14 for South Scotland. We wish all applicants success in winning approval from their RPACs. Will current contract holders please remember to submit all 2012 trapping records to SSRS as soon as possible?

Squirrels Large and Small

Of the 278 species of squirrels in the world, the difference between the largest and smallest is truly astounding. The heavyweight is the grey marmot, a ground squirrel that lives in the Himalayas. When it puts on weight for the winter it can reach up to 8kg (18lbs)! Among tree squirrels, the giants of Southeast Asia can tip the scales at up to 3kg (6lbs) which simply dwarfs the African pygmy tree squirrel, *Myosciurus pumilio*.



The smallest adults of the species can be smaller than some mice and are almost as light as a feather at around 16.5g (half an ounce) in weight. Compare that to our native red squirrels, who average nearly 20 times that at around 300g, and you can imagine how these tiny fragile creatures have found themselves on the IUCN red list of threatened species.



Upcoming Events

7th November 2012

Cross Border Landowner Engagement Day
Paxton House.

11th November 2012 - 10.00 to 16:30

The Mammal Society's Regional Seminar
Newbattle Abbey College, Dalkeith.

One day event with talks on key mammal issues in Scotland, including a talk on the Red Squirrels in South Scotland project. Booking is essential: please call 023 8023 7874

14th November 2012 - 19.00 to 21.00

Lockerbie Red Squirrel Talk
Lockerbie Town Hall - Community Rooms; DG11 2ES

Join us to hear all about red squirrel conservation in south Scotland. We will be talking about the challenges facing the species and the work being done to secure their future in Scotland. Come along and see how you can get involved. No charge; no booking required.

2nd February 2013 - 10.00 to 12.00.

Guided walk with the Angus SWT Members Group
Templeton Woods Visitor Centre, Dundee.

Meet at the car park. Short talk included. Angus members and general public welcome. No charge.

True or False?!

1. White squirrels are always albino (TRUE/FALSE)
2. Red squirrels moult twice a year (TRUE/FALSE)
3. North America has 8 species of tree squirrel (TRUE/FALSE)
4. Grey squirrels grow ear tufts in winter (TRUE/FALSE)
5. British red squirrels walked from Europe after the Ice Age (TRUE/FALSE)
6. A red squirrel's tail is almost as long as its body (TRUE/FALSE)

False true true false true true true true

One to tell your friends!

Q. What do squirrels give each other on Valentines Day?

A. Forget me nuts



SAVING
SCOTLAND'S
RED SQUIRRELS

www.scottishsquirrels.org.uk

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Project Partners



SSRS Funders



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