



NORTHERN RED SQUIRRELS

HELPING OUR REDS STAND UP FOR THEMSELVES

www.northernredsquirrels.org.uk

Issue 4
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NORTHERN NEWS

RSST Launch At Levens Hall

The Red Squirrel Survival Trust was officially launched at Levens Hall, Cumbria in April. Patron, Prince Charles, gave an excellent keynote speech to show his support for red squirrel conservation across the UK along with encouragement for our ongoing efforts in the North.

The day, attended by a whole host of volunteers, experts and donors, was an opportunity to share information and discuss issues surrounding red squirrel conservation. Media and Press reporters were present and it was a great opportunity to raise the profile of RSST and red conservation in general.

The event was an opportunity to celebrate the ongoing work of volunteers in Cumbria and to launch the RSST's Cumbrian Project to support voluntary efforts at grass-roots level. Although numbers were limited, many volunteers from Cumbria were present, along with representation from some Northumberland groups.

Most of the volunteers had the opportunity to have a few words with Prince Charles and those who did agreed that he was genuinely passionate about the cause and fully supportive of our ongoing voluntary action. Jackie Foott, NRS Co-coordinator, gave an excellent speech and overall the day was a resounding success with Prince Charles and RSST pledging their continued support for grass-roots efforts.



All Scrubbed Up For A Royal Day Out!

Penrith Red Squirrel Group, Cumbria's largest voluntary red squirrel conservation group, were out in force at the RSST Launch. Sarah McNeil, volunteer and photographer has provided RSST with some excellent squirrel pictures which have been made into postcards for their 'Friends Welcome Pack'.

*Front Row (from left): Wendy Martin, Robin Page, Sarah McNeil. Back Row (from left) Richard Dyke, Jerry Moss, Robert Benson, Gary Murphy.
Photo Courtesy of Nigel Housden Pinsharp Photography*

White Moss, Crosby Moor Update

White Moss, the SSSI at Crosby Moor, Cumbria has been the subject of much discussion since Bernard Widdowson, Brampton RS, alerted everyone to the fact that a planning application had been submitted to fell over 700 trees which are habitat to a population of red squirrels. Many people, local, squirrel volunteers and groups, raised their concerns and we are pleased to announce that the application has been WITHDRAWN pending further investigations. **A public meeting is to be held on: Wednesday 1st July 2009 7.30pm at Crosby-on-Eden Village Hall. If you live near enough please attend. Without support this red squirrel habitat may be lost!**

Wildlife Ark Trust Appeal

The Wildlife Ark Trust is a registered charity trying to save the red squirrel. To date they have raised £300,000 to allow the University of Liverpool to categorise the genomic sequence of the squirrelpox virus, and are also funding the research into the development of a squirrelpox vaccine. This work is being carried out by the Moredun Research Institute and started in January 2009.

The Wildlife Ark Trust needs our help by sending 'declarations of support' for their plans to open a **Red Squirrel Education Centre** in Keswick, Cumbria. The Centre, which will be a paid attraction, will help to generate funding for their work and other red conservation projects. Please send your declaration of support for the Centre to Robert Wilkin by email: don@wildlifearktrust.com or by post to The Wildlife Ark Trust, PO Box 63, Consett, Co Durham, DH8 0UR.

Gilsland Spa Woods Decimated

In the last NRS Newsletter Jan, Squirrel Action Greenhead and Gilsland (SAGG), was proud to announce that her group's hard work had paid off as red squirrels had made an amazing return to Gilsland Spa Woods after a concerted effort to eradicate grey squirrels in the area with the help of SOS Trapper, Jamie Stewart.

The SAGG Group are now devastated as part of the woodland, owned by the Cooperative Society, has been decimated. Felling has been carried out without consultation or apparent concern to any mammals in the immediate area, at a time when red squirrels are breeding and rearing young. "The whole area has been destroyed without any thought to our reds squirrels!" declared Jan. "One tree with a drey in it has been left in a wilderness of stumps! The felling has undone all our hard work." The Group are sad to report that only one red squirrel has been sighted in the area since the trees have been felled! The Forestry commission along with Natural England want to return the area to native woodland by removing the pine trees. However, included in the project a number of beech trees are also earmarked to be felled.

A Close Shave

I have just witnessed an amazing escape. This is a suckling female with swollen breasts and an elongated nipple showing under the left elbow. I had her in my frame waiting for a good pose when a goshawk swooped and knocked her off the capping stone. It happened unexpectedly and too fast to get the action shot - but boy would that have been worth a bob or two?! The squirrel is fine and back feeding just now.

Les Robertson, Copeland RS



News Report from Formby and Southport Red Alert

Red squirrels are still hanging on in the Formby area and it is hoped that the squirrel pox outbreak has burned itself out. Amy Campbell has been employed by Lancashire Wildlife Trust as the new Red Squirrel Field Officer. She has only been in post for a few weeks and has been visiting woodlands and parks in and around the reserve, As well as getting to know who is who in the area Amy has been pleased to sight red squirrels in the National Trust's Woodlands.

Members of the Formby and Southport Red Alert, together with the members of the other groups within the Sefton Coast refuge area, volunteered to help Save our Squirrels and Knowsley Safari Park, who have been working together to raise awareness and much needed cash for the conservation of the endangered red squirrel. Knowsley Safari Park set up a Save our Squirrels one stop shop over the Easter break where people could find out just what they need to know about red squirrel conservation.

Sally Orritt, People and Wildlife Officer for Save our Squirrels in Sefton said 'It was a great opportunity for us to meet new people; we couldn't have done it without the support of the Safari Park staff who were great. With over 20 volunteers involved and squirrel staff on different days, we needed quite a lot of support and co-coordinating, and we got it! The icing on the cake was the fundraising, as well as making great new

contacts we also raised over £2,000 from donations and merchandise! Thanks Everyone.'

The Sefton Coast red squirrel refuge has suffered catastrophic losses over the last two years due to squirrel pox virus. Monitoring data collected by volunteers across the area and analysed by Lancashire Wildlife Trust has shown that as few as one in ten may have survived the outbreak. Anyone sighting a sick red squirrel, in this area, should report it as quickly as possible on [07590 745862](tel:07590745862). Please report any sightings by telephone on 0151 920 3769 or at www.saveoursquirrels.org.

Red squirrels on the Knowsley Estate have survived a recent outbreak of the deadly squirrel pox disease and as a result, population monitoring has been re-established through the woodlands to check and help manage the situation. Knowsley and Rainford areas offer extensive habitat ideal for red squirrels. Rainford Red Squirrel group alongside groups in Little Crosby, Formby and Southport plan regular local events and activities to inform the public and raise funds. They also help to co-ordinate and maintain grey control to ensure that the areas remain firmly red.

We know that grey squirrels carry the virus and with fewer reds remaining there has never been a more important time to work together to save our squirrels.

Edited Version of articles sent in by David Rawlins, Formby and Southport RA

Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981)

The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) is supposedly there to help protect our reds, but time and again this Act has proved to be ineffectual. It states;

'Subject to the provisions of this Part, if any person intentionally (a) damages or destroys, or obstructs access to, any structure or place which any wild animal included in Schedule 5 uses for shelter or protection; or(b)disturbs any such animal while it is occupying a structure or place which it uses for that purpose, he shall be guilty of an offence.

Whilst, its intentions seem clear many Councils and other bodies are claiming that ONLY the tree with a drey in it is covered by the Act. To me, this is nonsense and clearly not the original intention of the act. WHY are these people allowed to get away with destroying habitats when it suits them? From small private wooded areas, whole woodlands and even trees with TPOs, the act is being disregarded and ignored, with the blessing it seems from those who should know better.

Obviously, plantations are a business - the trees are planted to be felled and most plantation owners are now sensitive and supportive of red conservation and follow the guidelines required to ensure minimum impact to the red squirrels that have inhabited their woods. Generally, it is not these woodland owners who fault the Act, but other woodlands - Gilsland Spa is just such a case, as is White Moss. In Ponteland, the local County Council has given permission for TPO trees inhabited by reds to be felled and more recently passed a planning application which will have a terrible impact on a small area of woodland with two dreys clearly visible and daily sightings of reds! When challenged, the County Council Officers actually stated that the Act 'only referred to the tree with the drey in it!' Please let's lobby to get this Act reworded so its intention is clear!

By Sally Hardy

Berwick RS Monitoring in Kyloe Woods

Recently we have been monitoring squirrels feeders in a mainly broadleaved area of Kyloe wood. Invited by Scottish Woodlands to do this work we are now in week 7 of the contract. Monitoring the area each week, week in, week out may become boring for some folk, but observing the phenology of the wood is inspiring as Kyloe is full of surprises! We have found hair samples in the tubes, but these have been from bats and mice and thankfully we have not had any grey squirrel hair. Our greatest surprise was finding four speckled wood butterflies. The sighting is the most northern for this species so far.

If you haven't visited Kyloe Woods, then you should. Planted from collected species in the 1860's, the wood has over 123 species of trees. Sea Captain, Leylandii, brought tree species he found all over the world to be planted at Kyloe. There are stunning examples of Wellingtonia, Lodgepole Pine, Chilean Pine and, my favourite, the Noble Fir. It is a great place to survey and monitor for red squirrels.

By Elizabeth Bamford, Berwick SOS, RSG Photo by John Rae



Red Squirrel Review

The Red Squirrel Review has been finalised and is available via email from NRS. As expected not everybody has agreed with or approved of all parts of the Review but it does have some good recommendations and forms a basis for future work.

The Forestry Commission and Natural England have put together a draft framework for the next step for which the details are still to be worked out, but it will involve a closer liaison between all interested organisations and parties. The importance of our volunteer work is now recognised and we shall be fully represented, consulted and involved as part of the ongoing management of red squirrel conservation. The message to come out of the Review is that we must all work together and speak the same language - it is encouraging to see this already happening. Part of the plan is a means by which all interested squirrel organisations can come together to share information.

I shall be representing NRS on the steering group as we move forward and would be happy to answer any questions you may have. Some of the changes will take time to implement but in general the news is good and the red squirrels are already feeling the benefits!

By Jackie Foott

Allerdale RSG News

Allerdale Red Squirrel Group have been successful in gaining RSST funding towards a red squirrel survey & grey control in Forestry Commission woodland at Setmurthy near Cockermouth. We are in the process of gaining Public Liability Insurance & completing the necessary documentation; risk assessments & method statements etc. ahead of starting the project. Public Liability Insurance for volunteers is a requirement of many land owners; council, National Trust, FC etc. This insurance covers volunteers, it does not cover shooting, all marksmen must have their own personal public liability insurance to cover shooting.

Allerdale RSG have been contacted by Liverpool University to check that plans, submitted by Cumbria County Council in conjunction with Natural England, to regenerate a previous landfill site into a red squirrel habitat are correct. This should be seen as a major success.....volunteers advising/double checking the advisors !!!!!

Check out our new website, which was recently launched in the local press: www.allerdaledredsquirrels.co.uk

By Jo Kirkbride Allerdale RSG

Owl Box Provides A Useful Haven

Some of you may remember Cheeky, Ponteland's third abandoned red squirrel, which was hand-reared and released back into the wild (well Darras Hall Gardens!) in June 2008. We are pleased to say that he has continued to make a regular appearance, although to be fair we do get three or four different reds visiting our garden each day, so we can't be absolutely 100% sure! When Cheeky was released we placed two owl boxes in our trees (one of which he had used in his enclosure). We split the hay bedding he had slept on and put half in each box, to ensure he would recognise them. We can now confirm that at least one of these boxes is regularly used by 'Cheeky', who is often seen climbing out to forage for food. The boxes are way down the garden and we have not yet managed to get a decent photo!

Sally Hardy, Ponteland RS

Northumberland Report

Well, it's been a mixed spring in Northumberland with an increase, as expected, of grey squirrels making their presence known. Morpeth Red Squirrels have been working hard, despite an initial set-back which has now been resolved. The Tyne Valley continues to be a problem, but we are hoping that we will be able to sort that area out this year. We have a meeting planned to encourage local action and now have an excellent trapper to cover the area – so fingers and toes are crossed. This area is an important point where greys are flooding over from the west part of Gateshead, eastern part of County Durham and south. Chopwell Woods (FC) lost its reds many years ago and is now a firm breeding ground for greys, which then disperse over the hill into Greenside, Prudhoe and also the Slaley Reserves. They then make their way north into central Northumberland! Trapping along the Tyne has already made a difference, but much more needs to be done to close this incursion route. On a positive note, we have had many reports of reds returning to areas where they had not been seen for more than a year. Milbourne now has regular sightings, along with Dissington Hall and Swarland, after pox had wiped out the last remaining reds in spring 2008.

Let's hope we can all work together to make Northumberland COMPLETELY RED!

By Sally Hardy, NRS Co-ordinator

Cumbrian Report

Success is being measured by the increasing numbers of red sightings and ample evidence of their breeding. Observers are reporting seeing groups of young reds dispersing from their family dreys, with many getting into mischief on feeders! As we move into new areas for control there are still plenty of greys to be found, but in locations where they have been culled continuously over the past few years the numbers of grey sightings and kills are definitely down. Maybe this is because they did not have a good winter last year, because of disease or because the control is doing to them what they have been doing to the reds in the past ie. preventing their breeding and dispersing. Please let us know your experiences or thoughts on this subject.

Josh (Director RSST) and Jackie (Coordinator NRS) have been meeting with different organisations and agencies in Cumbria with very encouraging results. Discussions show that our goals of red squirrel conservation are similar and that if we all speak the same language and work together, those goals are achievable.

Finally, I should like to apologise that in the last Northern News it was indicated that Cumbria Wildlife Trust were not aware of the red squirrels in one of their reserves. In fact they were fully aware of their red population and were pleased to have it confirmed that there were no greys found during the NRS project.

By Jackie Foott, NRS Cumbria Coordinator

Forthcoming Talks and Meetings....

Hexham/Tyne Valley Talk – NRS Groups have organised a talk, along with SOS to encourage locals in the Hexham and Tyne Valley to get behind their few remaining reds. Hexham Golf Course, 29th June 7pm

Berwick SOS RSG have organised a Presentation Talk with SOS to encourage red squirrel conservation and local action in the Wooler area. All Welcome! Place: Cheviot Centre, Wooler Date: 6th July 2009 Time: 7pm

SOS have organised a local groups meeting at Stannington Village Hall, Thursday 25th June 7pm. Hope to see you there for an update and chat!

CUMBRIA GATHERING A picnic in the park is being organised for ALL volunteers (from Cumbria, Northumberland, Yorkshire and beyond!) This will be a great day out for all! – details/date to be confirmed. For further info please contact Jackie Foott.

PLEASE PASS THIS NEWSLETTER TO ANYONE INTERESTED IN RED CONSERVATION!

Thank you to ALL our contributors. Our next NRS Northern News will be out at the end September 2009.

If you would like to contribute stories, information, events please send them to Sally: email pontelandredsquirrels@yahoo.co.uk by 20th September 2009

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