

WESTMORLAND RED SQUIRREL SOCIETY

Newsletter

Issue 3 Autumn 2011

Welcome to the third issue of our newsletter. Yes we are still here and going from strength to strength thanks mainly to our ever expanding number of members. In this edition we have a number of personal views on red squirrel conservation, from a heart-warming story of the care of three orphaned red squirrels, known as the 3 R's; to a view from one of our volunteer trappers. We now also have a 'Your Squirrels' page for people to share photos and stories of the squirrels in their gardens.

There are also updates for you on various funding initiatives and news on the application for charitable status – we hope by the time of the next newsletter (at the end of February) we will be a charity, with all the benefits that will bring. Thanks to Steph and Jackie in particular for their work on this project. In addition to reports from our area, from further afield we have an article from the Anglesey Red Squirrel Project and information about the Foulshaw Moss project.

We have more than doubled our membership since our last AGM and we are very grateful to you all, without you we could not continue with the red squirrel conservation work in the S.Lakes, once again a very big thank you to you all. I would also like to personally extend a very big thank you to the children of Langdale C. of E. School who decided we should be the beneficiary of the proceeds of their open day. Hopefully we can reward them with red squirrels once again being seen around the School, and in increasing numbers up and down the Valley.

Geoff Hetherington, Chairman

WRSS records

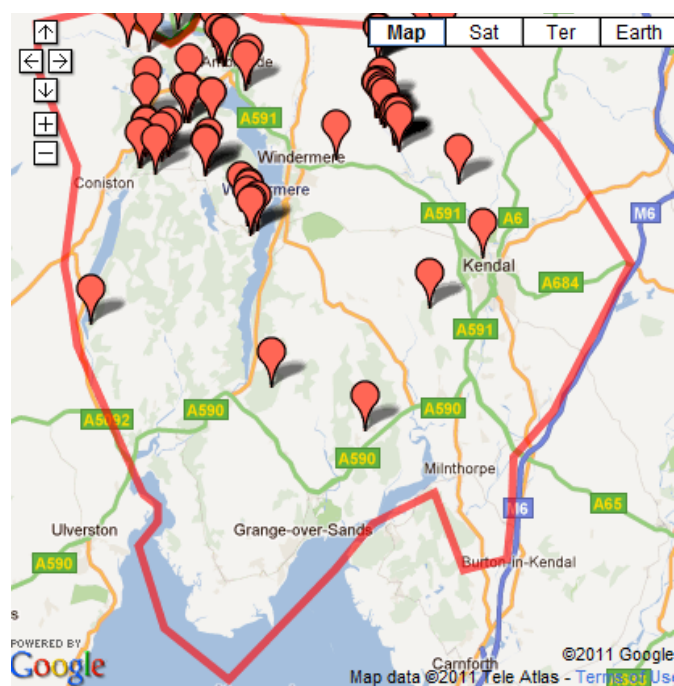
Our reported red sightings are vital to show where our red squirrels are in need of protection – many thanks to all of you who have taken the trouble to send in this data.

The map gives us an idea of the (minimum) range of our red squirrel population, but not the density. You can get more detail of individual markers (numbers seen, date and specific location) on the WRSS website. There have been over 80 reported sightings in 2011 so far, please continue to send in your sightings via the website:

www.westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk

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Foulshaw Moss

Peter Lurz, Corrie Bruemmer and John Gurnell

Foulshaw Moss is part of a European Protected Site designated for its lowland raised mire habitat and associated species assemblage. In the '50s and '60s, Foulshaw was planted with conifer trees. Once the trees reached cone bearing age, the surrounding red squirrel population spread into this plantation and maintained a population despite the arrival of grey squirrels in the surrounding area. After grey squirrels started being recorded on Foulshaw Moss, Cumbria Wildlife Trust (CWT) initiated a grey squirrel control programme, trapping the entire site three times a year for five years. Despite this, monitoring of the red squirrel population indicated that their numbers were still declining.



A red squirrel cautiously investigating a squirrel trap on Foulshaw.

CWT is legally obliged to restore the site to lowland raised mire, which means removing more trees this winter. This will have an impact on the remaining red squirrel population. In order to minimise this impact, and following previous consultations (Peter Lurz, pers. comm.), CWT will keep the woodlands at Ulpha Fell and Ulpha Wood on Foulshaw, creating a linked core area for red squirrels. In addition, based on the results from the previous five year of grey squirrel control, the grey squirrel control program was intensified. This entails trapping at a higher trap density and more frequently (five times a year instead of three). One trapping day was dropped from the end of each session, as previous data had shown that grey squirrels were rarely caught on the last day of trapping. This attempted to maximise the limited resources available for trapping. In addition, Cumbria Wildlife Trust commissioned Queen Mary, London University (QMUL) to monitor red squirrel populations at Foulshaw Moss during the course of the habitat restoration work.

John Gurnell (QMUL) and Peter Lurz, working in collaboration with Anna Meredith, Head of Exotic Animal and Wildlife Service, Edinburgh University, will assess the effectiveness of the new grey squirrel control regime. They will review it regularly so it can be adapted depending on results. In addition the impact of the proposed restoration work will be assessed and management recommendations for red squirrel conservation on the Mosses will be provided.



A male red squirrel being released after receiving a health check

Initial work carried out this spring included a broad scale habitat survey to determine the quality of woodlands for squirrels throughout Foulshaw so that recommendations on the felling regime could be made to CWT. The ongoing squirrel monitoring work includes walked visual transects, trapping and health checks of captured reds. This work will continue until the end of 2012. In June, the CWT funded grey squirrel controller and the research group teamed up to undertake a simultaneous grey squirrel control session throughout the currently remaining woodland. Close to 50 grey squirrels were removed. The large number of grey squirrels caught indicates that immigration from the surrounding countryside is high. The good news is that 5 red squirrels were also captured: three females and two male and a further animal was sighted at Ulpha Fell. Encouragingly, all three captured females had bred this spring and one of the females was pregnant again with a second, summer litter. Hopefully, removing so many grey squirrels, continuing the grey squirrel control effort and maintaining a core area will give these reds and their offspring the best chance of survival in a difficult situation.



Captured red squirrel at Foulshaw

Events 2011

Our 2011 events programme got off to flying start with Damson Day in the Lyth Valley in April where we had a visit from Robin Page, the journalist, author and staunch supporter of red squirrel conservation. This was the first outing for our new gazebo purchased with funding from **The Hadfield Trust**.

Damson Day 2011 – Robin Page signing copies of his book



Country Fest at the end of May was disappointing in terms of weather and this probably affected overall visitor numbers compared with last year. The cold, blustery wind and showers blowing straight into our gazebo were challenging, to say the least!



Langdale Gala 2011 – the WRSS gazebo providing some welcome shade!

Following a stand at the Myerscough College Country Fair near Garstang in June, our next venue was the Langdale Gala at the beginning of July. The day was an absolute scorcher, and surrounded by stunning scenery it was the perfect example of a local Cumbrian country event – Cumberland & Westmorland wrestling, fell races and sports, a dog show, local crafts and music and not forgetting the delicious food. It is therefore very sad to hear that this 2011 show may have been the final Langdale Gala to be held.

Other events we have attended include Ings Sheepdog Trails, the Vale of Rydal Sheep Dog Trails and the Hawkshead Agricultural Show. There has been lots of interest at all of these events, new contacts made and new members joining. We have been asked to attend more events next year, examples being invitations from Rusland Show and the Cumbria Steam Gathering.

2012 Events – volunteers needed

As we get invited to attend more events, we will need more volunteers to be on the stand – it can get very hectic on the day, as Geoff experienced at the Hawkshead Show – he hardly had a moment to catch his breath. In the next newsletter we hope to have a list of all events we are attending in 2012 – so if you fancy a day out in the shelter of our lovely new WRSS gazebo, meeting the public and telling them about our work – please let us know.

A tale of 3 R's by Wendy 'Squirrel'

10am. Sat. March 26th

Good friend, Susan Southworth of the Allerdale Group rang. Panic stations, "will you take on a squirrel?" "Yes of course".

An hour later we meet at Rheged, Susan carrying a shoebox with 4 kittens, eyes not yet open, found in a Lorton garden, the owner rang Susan to say their wire-haired terrier had a kitten in its mouth (Maybe her 3 cats had vandalised the drey above? - who knows).

The bloodied shoe box looked ominous so off to Frame and Swifts the Penrith vets we went, where one kitten, too badly bitten, had to be put to sleep. Then it was back home to Butterwick with shaved, bitten, kittens and medication and "back in the "old routine for W, sleeping on the sofa, 1ml feeds every 2 hours.

It was a hamster cage on my hall windowsill next and then after a dash up the M6 to Carlisle Pets at Home a £100 rat cage which the firm generously donated on the spot. The 3 active kittens fast outgrew that cage, so the 3 R's, Robin (after Mr. Page), Rachael (Robins sister) and 'Rory' (after my new neighbour Rory Stewart, MP for Penrith and the Border) moved to breathe fresh air into the outside cage in the garden. Former tenants? ~Wendy 4legs and last year my 'Eddie'. The cage 4'x4'x8' loaned by Jerry Moss and Sarah McNeil, pine branches, climbing rope, terrific fun!

But... you can guess? It wasn't long before my good friend, Geoff Hetherington, got a call, "HELP"

As Bob Bradley (always my no. 1 squirrel vet) said... If Geoff builds a pen for you "it'll be a fortress" - and boy! what a fantastic fortress it is, fit for purpose, 5* accommodation. 2x6'x6' pens, roofed, sliding doors between. 12' high onto my cottage gable end and 9' in front. I call it my 'field hospital for injured, orphaned red squirrels, technically a temporary wooden sectional structure laid on concrete blocks.

Geoff donated all the timber, cut from the WRSS reserve at Staveley, brought his joiner Steve Todd from Kendal and with WRSS volunteer Dave Marshall and Leigh Stott and Keith Gowling from this area, my 'pencil sketch' became a big reality before my eyes.



The fantastic fortress

Bernard Parker (P&DRSG) donated all the wire, including 2 layers of 'rat protection' under the 4" earth and turf on the cage floor, feeders and nest boxes were made and donated by Mal Moore of Allerdale Group and the Penrith RS Volunteers, while Christian Grammar of Ullswater Steamers sent metres and metres of rope for "kittens-cradle" exercising.

Since April when the word spread, I've had more than 380 children and adults waltz over my bridge to see the kittens. Locals, (even a W.I. meeting held here), holidaymakers from all over the UK, some from abroad, often leaving small donations. I've sold squirrel cards, badges, spread the Red Message and so far, 37 of Robin Pages delightful book "Why the squirrel hides its nuts" (50p from each book sold goes direct to Red Squirrel conservation, if you've not yet seen it, do buy it from WRSS).



Robin and Lulu first met the 3R's on April 14th, let loose in my hall. Typically one kitten went 'walk about' discovered stairs and Robin had to bound along the landing into my bedroom, just in time to retrieve 'Rory' on the curtain rail above the open window. Robin wrote about the incident in a Telegraph Country Diary, and has since kindly sent a cheque for £125 towards the cost of the squirrel pen (all those 50p's).

With this project I can't think of a better example of the terrific co-operation that exists between all our 'Red' volunteers - those I call the true 'grass roots', ones who know the ground, habitat, Red/Grey habits just because they want to help save our endangered native species.

Those members of WRSS, Allerdale and Penrith have given time, energy, boundless enthusiasm and money towards this successful project, for which I am extremely grateful.

It has been the best possible rewarding PR 'event' ever! It's now awfully quiet in Butterwick!..... maybe.....?..... next year?

Wendy
Aug, 2011

A Trapper's View

Why do I do this?

It's a question I often ask myself, particularly when I'm out checking traps in the pouring rain and the voice of the last person who told me "you'll never stop the grey squirrels now" is still ringing in my ears. The simple answer is somebody's got to do it, so that's why I, and the other volunteer trappers go out in all weathers to catch as many grey squirrels as we can and give the red squirrels a chance.

From a personal point of view the question is much simpler; I left Southampton 5 years ago with the sole intention of moving to Cumbria to help with red squirrel conservation. It's been a steep learning curve, but I like to think that I have a very practical approach to the subject: sometimes you have to kill one species to save another, it's not nice but it's a fact of life. So that's why I get up usually before 7 am each weekday and leave home by 8 am (not unusual you might think) and then spend the next 2 ½ hours travelling by bus to Ambleside. Now that is crazy, except that I have the benefit of travelling through some of the most beautiful scenery in England. Somewhat different to my old bus route in Southampton, no views of fell sides, mountains or waterfalls there, and a lot less sheep.

In Ambleside I meet up with a colleague and after a cup of coffee and a check to make sure that we've got enough traps, feeders and bait we set off in his 4x4. Believe it or not I used to do all this by bus. Now that is commitment, or just plain daft of course, but now we can cover woodlands over a wide area, including those difficult to reach places along rough tracks and up steep hillsides. It was at the top of one of these tracks that we made a pleasant discovery just the other day: not one but two red squirrels in the traps we had placed previously. It was a sheer delight to release them unharmed back into their woodland home, especially as the owner of the wood had assured me that there were only grey squirrels there. We took the traps away and left the red squirrels in peace. What a welcome change from the usual round of traps containing greys. Sometimes I think there must be a factory producing them, as you can go back to the same spot week after week and find more. All I will say at this point is that grey squirrel heaven, if there is such a place, must be getting pretty full this year due to our efforts. Not only have we been catching more red squirrels this year, we are also being told about far more sightings of them by people that we meet on our trap rounds. That particular day I left Ambleside with a real sense of achievement; the long hours of work really are paying off.

As well as the successes of course, there are failures: when grey squirrels that you know are there just refuse to go into the traps, and the frustration from knowing that there at the moment there aren't enough resources available to be 100% successful, this we hope will change in the near future. If we had more people to help with the work and more money to pay their expenses, then we would make much faster progress and maybe then really secure the future for red squirrels not just in the Westmorland group area, but right across the north of England.

Jeff Scovell
7th August 2011

Conservation projects working together- red kites

As most people now know the only way to keep our remaining red squirrels is to remove the greys and at the moment there is no way other than to cull them.

One problem we face is what to do with the cadavers and I personally hate to waste anything so have used as many as I can for feed to ferrets and I am a falconer so I feed my hawk on them but this still leaves a vast amount of surplus so we have had no choice other than to incinerate. When I heard about the red kite conservation project at Grizedale I contacted Forestry Commission Wildlife ranger Iain Yoxall to see if he would be interested in using the culled greys as feed for the 30 red kites they were raising this year, and I was very pleased when he said he would.

I went up with several boxes full of deep frozen greys and met Iain in July and had a good talk about wildlife and conservation and we loaded all the squirrels into the freezers for the kites. Iain explained there is one more year of the kite project so he would be happy to take any more we can provide so for at least another year we can put the culled greys to a very good use which is very good news.

I believe the 30 raised this year have now been released and are flying around Cumbria so keep a look out for them and report any sightings to Iain. Anyone wanting to contact Iain, or get more information about the kites can look at the forestry commission web site.

Dave Marshall

Funding news

Grey Control Fund

This Spring it was a very bitter blow indeed to find that our two grant applications to the Grey Control Fund had been turned down by Red Squirrels Northern England (RSNE), who are now administering the fund. For 2010 we had been awarded £2,500 from this fund and we felt confident that we had put together a good case for a continuation of this support for our control effort. Our worry now is that once again official funding will focus only on those red squirrels within the designated strongholds, leaving most of the red squirrel

Cumbria Community Foundation

We were therefore very fortunate indeed to have received £1000 from the Cumbria Community Foundation for volunteer expenses for 2011. The original intention in our application to CCF had been that this would 'top up' our funding from the Grey Control Fund, but instead it has proved to be an absolute lifeline without which we would have had great difficulty this year in sustaining the level of conservation effort across our area.



Membership subscriptions and donations

In order to continue our grey control work, we have also had to rely heavily this year on our income from membership subscriptions and from generous personal and corporate donations. We are very grateful indeed for this continuing support and cannot stress enough how vital it is in maintaining the conservation effort.

Cumbria Wildlife Trust

CWT has donated £300 towards our control effort in the Witherslack area, where we are working to ensure that there are safe havens for any red squirrels displaced by CWT's proposed tree felling activity which is designed to enhance the raised mire on the nearby mosses.

Recent funding awards

Our thanks go to the **Arran Brewery** for the £250 donated towards our captive breeding programme, and also to **Skelwith Parish Council** for the £200 donated for food and traps. We were very touched indeed that the pupils of **Langdale C of E Primary School** decided that WRSS would be the beneficiary of the money raised at their recent Open Day. It is very encouraging to hear that our red squirrels are valued by the latest generation of young people, and we would like to say a big 'thank you' to them all. We hope they will continue their interest and will soon be reporting their red squirrel sightings to us via our website.

Corporate sponsors

WRSS thanks its corporate sponsors for their continuing support which is very much appreciated:

- Westmorland County Agricultural Society
- I Whittaker Décor Service
- Whitestiles Filling Station
- Bluefin Insurance
- Natwest
- Pestforce South Lakes
- TH Wiggans Ironmonger
- Glen Rothay Hotel/ Badger Bar
- Builders Supply, Kendal
- J2 Connection Ltd
- Mealbank Properties
- Howden's Joinery

WIGs

In the WRSS area around Rydal/Loughrigg we have the southern tip of the Thirlmere red squirrel stronghold (formerly known as reserves/buffer zones). Within stronghold areas it is possible for landowners to apply to the Forestry Commission for Woodland Improvement Grants (WIGs) to control grey squirrels. With only two WIGs currently operational within our small WRSS area of stronghold, we had just started work to identify the remaining landowners with a view to encouraging them to apply for WIGs and so control the greys on their land – this is an area of strategic importance if we are to prevent the incursion of greys into the area covered by the Grasmere Red Squirrel Group to the north. It was looking as though this would become a mammoth task for us, even though we had support and encouragement from the local Forestry Commission officer. Following a meeting with Nick Mason, head of the new Red Squirrels Northern England project (RSNE), we are delighted to announce that RSNE have been in talks with the Forestry Commission in order to maximise the benefits of WIGs generally, and that RSNE have offered to take over from us the task of contacting landowners and applying for WIGs in our WRSS area of stronghold. The aim is to have the WIG funding in place for next year, and we hope to bring further news of progress in the next *WRSS Newsletter*.

News From Other Areas

Grasmere Area

Our big news is that three tiny reds were discovered on the roadside on the 27th March. A local resident found them early in the morning when walking the family dog. He told his mother, and she returned to the spot, waited to see if an adult squirrel was nearby, then took them home. There was quite a lot of blood about and one of them had a one inch long gash on its back above its tail. She wrapped them in a duvet cover and put them in the dog basket. This was the best thing she could have done as they needed to be kept warm and secure as the greatest threat to their survival was shock as a result of the traumatic attack. She phoned me and I took them to Bob Bradley, a retired vet who breeds reds.

Later we examined the location where they were found and there is a drey in the tree about 20 feet directly above



the spot. As I drove them away we went under the drey and one of them made two squawks!

Bob said they were 4-5 week old. He examined the injured one and said that there were teeth marks on the inside of one thigh. This meant that it had been grabbed from behind by a mammal. Dreys consist of dense matted twigs without an opening and a predator must therefore be strong enough to penetrate it. Bob thinks it would be a stoat, polecat or pine marten. We know we have stoats – has anyone seen either of the others?

Bob has been feeding the two females and one male with ewe's milk and all three are doing well. He is now starting to wean them and we hope to release them back in Grasmere.



Anglesey Red Squirrel Project – Can't see the wood for the trees...

We often meet local landowners who have planted trees under the Better Woodlands for Wales scheme and are keen to talk about red squirrel conservation. Sadly all too often the tree species mixtures are dominated by birch, ash, alder, willow and rowan and contain small amounts of oak and hazel. This unfortunately is a poor habitat for red squirrels because the species produce very small seed.

Although red squirrels will eat tree flowers and buds, their diet is dominated by tree seeds, and population densities are highest in woodlands with Sweet chestnut, hazel, oak, beech and walnut. Coniferous trees such as Scots pine, European larch and Norway spruce all produce very favourable seed crops and squirrels will also benefit from lodgepole pine and Sitka spruce if these are present in woodland stands.

We would recommend that anyone considering planting new woodlands with a view to creating an attractive red squirrel habitat should minimise the use of small seeding broadleaved trees such as birch, ash and willow and place an emphasis upon oak, hazel, beech and sweet chestnut with both larch and Scots pine scattered through any mixture. Large leaved lime, cherry and ash can be included and European walnut too.

Where early seed production is important, species such as hazel, Scots pine and larch will produce seed by the time the trees are ten years old; attracting red squirrels and benefiting a range of woodland species.

Anglesey Red Squirrel Project - Red squirrels brighten up island bird tables

We are delighted to report that red squirrels are now visiting gardens and bird tables across the south coast of Anglesey and are becoming increasingly common elsewhere. Red squirrels have been seen in Tawlrn, Plas Llandufnan, Pentre Berw, Llangaffo, Llanfairpwll., Glyn Garth, and also recently at Tros yr Marian in the far south east corner of the island. Feeding red squirrels is a great way of getting regular visits from these enchanting creatures and provides a good way of monitoring the spread of the populations and the health of individuals. In addition to the increased sightings of red squirrels, we have had a dramatic and parallel decline in the number of grey squirrel sightings reported.

In 2011 there have been two sightings of grey squirrels; one at Plas Newydd and a second sighting near Brynsciencyn. Subsequent intensive trapping at these locations allowed both animals to be removed. In 2011, we have widened our focus to try and monitor the spread of red squirrels from Anglesey to Gwynedd. There have been several sightings of red squirrels in Treborth gardens over the winter and we have greatly reduced the numbers of grey squirrels there.

Your Squirrels

We'd love to hear about your squirrels and see your photos. You can send your letters, stories and photos to us at: sightings@westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk

A couple of photographs of the latest additions to our compliment of squirrels - there are four young ones, the fourth was trying to join its siblings in the bird house but there wasn't room, and I was too slow to get a picture of all four.



They have discovered how to help themselves to the nuts on our windowsill and the adults have learned from them, they can be pillaging at any time of the day but usually early morning and early evening is the busiest time.

Bev Stevens (Nr Coniston)

Although not officially within the WRSS area, we count ourselves as honorary members. We have had regular squirrel visitors for the 5 years that we have lived in the area, in fact the day we came to view the house we saw our first ever red squirrel (well actually 2 chasing each other) – it was love at first sight, both for the house and the squirrels!

The squirrel (and bird) food bill is large but less than my previous spending on shoes and handbags (according to my husband). I spoil our red babies with extra hazelnuts, brazil nuts and walnuts (shelled to make sure they eat them rather than bury them). The last 3 years we have been lucky enough to have brave individuals who come and have their treats either on the doorstep or occasionally on my knee. This year's is called Apache as he has brown patches in his tail that make it look like an arrow.



Apache



A special day – yes there were 6 (with a 7th off camera)

We look forward to the visit of our squirrels, most days we see at least 2 or 3 – occasionally we have more – the record is 9 in the garden at once.

One sad footnote – we recently found a dead red on the lawn, with no signs of illness or injury. The post mortem said it had adenovirus enteritis, another disease that affects reds (believed to be naturally occurring). There is not a lot of information on this virus, yet, but there was an article on the diagnosis of viruses (including reference to the adenovirus) in the Spring edition of the WRSS newsletter. For now we will watch our reds carefully, but with no visible symptoms, all we can do is make sure the feeders are kept very clean.

Jackie and Jonathan (Nr Crosby Ravensworth)

Obituary Michael (Mik) Turner

It is with great sadness that I have to announce the passing away of Michael (Mik) Turner. Mik was a firearms enquiry officer with Cumbria Constabulary and a very good friend. He was always ready to help with any queries on any aspect of firearms and was very well respected in the shooting circle. Mik featured in our first issue helping Alex Todd a forester with L.D.N.P.A. at Haverthwaite Heights redressing the serious grey squirrel damage. Mik will be sorely missed and our sincere condolences go out to his family.

Witherslack & Grange

Witherslack

Summer 2011 has been a very busy time in this area, we have more people trapping than ever and I now have a regular assistant trapper (Ken) who is able to watch a trap line through the week most weeks and has helped me a great deal. This has enabled us to get into some of the woods a little further from the populations of reds which is vital for their long term survival. We are still just about in the intense removal of the grey stage of the operation but for the most part we are now having to search for greys now. This actually makes it much harder as when there are less of them they have the free run of the woods to move around in. Luckily for me but not so lucky for the trees the greys have been very active in stripping bark from the trees this year, this has enabled me to see where squirrels are by looking out for the strips of bark under trees (these look like somebody has used a pen knife to whittle a stick) So by systematically trapping the usual woods while pushing further out into more remote woods and then targeting areas I see signs of squirrels is how we have made some good progress..



Severe bark stripping by grey squirrels

We have had a steady stream of red sightings again this year and some of these are reds venturing off Foulshaw Moss and some are likely to be ones bred in captivity last year and the year before.

CWT have been granted the licence to remove the remaining trees from Foulshaw and Meathop moss, and these are where the majority of the reds are at present. The trust has put some resources into conserving the reds in Ulpha Fell and wood (which are not being felled) and join onto the mosses.

Grange and Meathop Area

One of the biggest areas of uncontrolled grey squirrels in our area was Meathop woods which is very near Meathop moss (to be felled) and Ulpha woods and fell (being kept) so it was right at the top of my list to deal with this summer. Luckily I was put in touch with the new wardens of at one of the Caravan parks and found out the site was closed for renovation so this was the perfect opportunity to get a grip on the situation. For a few weeks we were catching a large amount and after talking to the neighbouring caravan parks and hotels and them helping control greys on their properties we have made some huge progress. Obviously there is still work to do but this has to have improved the chances for the reds during and after CWT continuing bog restoration tree removal program.

Grange-Over-Sands has a few new garden trappers and these have accounted for a lot of greys which is some places have reached large numbers. There have been less greys seen and trapped in the areas that were trapped last year but we still need more people to trap in their gardens so please get in touch if you can help.

This Winter

The woods have already started to produce their annual crop of squirrel food and the greys are now moving into the hazel and clearing the nuts off the trees (the nuts are nowhere near ripe and the kernel is still tiny) so from now on they are much harder to trap so we are going to spend a lot of time shooting the overwintering greys and trapping whenever I get an opportunity, garden feeding greys can be caught all year so in the villages and towns there can still be caught.

Over all I am very pleased how things have gone this year, I only wish there were more hours in the day and the trapping season were longer (and drier!)

Dave Marshall

Kentmere & Longsleddale

Longsleddale

This year Longsleddale got off to a cracking start with one of the residents calling to say they have just had three young red squirrels visit their garden. The adults visit on a regular basis so the constant supply of hazelnuts that they are used to must have done the trick!

The latest update is:- they are all fit and well.

Just recently the lady concerned went next door to see the visitors who were having breakfast, to inform them that the squirrels had turned up for the usual feed, but by the time they came over to have a look, two more had turned up so now there were five! This was the highlight of their holiday. No wonder Centre Parcs Whinfell employ a full time red squirrel ranger.

After I had been trapping in Mealbank recently one of the residents wrote an article (reprinted below) for the local parish magazine to update people on the situation locally.

Kentmere Valley

Kentmere Valley still has regular sightings of reds; grey control is still on going with the numbers generally reducing.

The last 20% or so are always harder to account for as they have more room for manoeuvre. Also it is more difficult to trap them at this time of year because of the natural food coming on stream. Come new year with our extra volunteers we will be making a concerted effort to clear out the remaining population from the top of Kentmere down through Staveley, Bowston and Garnett Bridge and up the Longsleddale Valley.

Further afield we are making progress all around Kendal, to the South around Sedgwick and to the West, Underbarrow and Crook; we hope to link up these areas with the well controlled area around Witherslack, taking in Brigsteer and Levens.

Geoff Hetherington

Reds on the Move

After many years of losing the battle against the encroachment of American Grey Squirrels, the indigenous population of Red Squirrels in our area are starting to enjoy a bit of a come-back. Thanks largely to the trapping efforts of the Westmorland Red Squirrel Society (WRSS) and other like-minded organisations and individuals, the greys are slowly being eliminated, allowing Reds to re-colonise their traditional habitats. Reds are now moving down Longsleddale towards the A6 and have come down Kentmere and reached as far south as Staveley. Just this week (w/c 8/8/11) a Red was reported near Low Groves, presumably one of the Kentmere or Sleddale population seeking new territory as the populations expand. WRSS explain that it is vital to clear the Greys out of areas adjoining Red populations if the Reds are to have a good chance of re-colonising more widely as they breed.

Reds and Greys cannot co-exist; Greys carry a squirrel pox virus which, although harmless to them, is invariably lethal to any Reds they come into contact with. Greys also dominate other species in ways in which indigenous Reds do not; they kill off bird populations and destroy flora, including domestic vegetable and fruit crops.

The proven solution to help Reds thrive is the humane trapping of Greys. In 2010 WRSS trapped 81 Greys in the Kentmere and Sleddale area. A new trapping initiative in Mealbank has already accounted for 8 Greys, but there are still lots to go at before our Reds can return safely.

If you can help by providing a site for a trap(s) or with a donation, or simply to record sightings of either Reds or Greys, you can contact WRSS on 01539 822089 or on geoff@westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk or submit your sightings online to www.westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk

Date for your Diary

Squirrel Fest Brockhole

The Lake District Visitor Centre
on the shores of Windermere on the A591

Sunday
18 September
from 12 noon

A day of free family fun
celebrating the red squirrel

Games and craft activities

Face painting

Badge making

Treasure hunt

Live music from Blue Jam

Learn about the work being done
to protect red squirrels and how
you can help

Ring 015394 46601 to find out more

Northern red squirrels

Helping our reds stand up for themselves
www.northernredsquirrels.org.uk

Pay and display parking

www.lakedistrict.gov.uk

Lake District
National Park

Ambleside & Langdale

Ambleside and Langdale are having a successful year - seeing fewer greys and many more sightings of reds. We have released 7 healthy reds from traps covering quite a wide area.

Shocked and saddened to have had no finance from the Grey Squirrel Control Fund this year led to a change in tactics as we could no longer afford to trap 7 days per week. A decision was made to reduce expenses by closing all the traps on Fridays re-opening them on Mondays thus effectively trapping for just 4 days. When we close the traps we put up feeders to keep the squirrels attracted to the area and on Mondays we re-open the traps where it could be seen there has been squirrel activity. We were amazed to discover that there was no reduction in the number of squirrels being caught - we were catching as many in 4 days as we had previously caught in 7. This meant we were not needlessly baiting traps where no squirrel activity was present (and thus just feeding mice and birds) so it has been a very positive experience and we have accounted for more than 600 greys this year.

Badgers are a problem as they are such powerful creatures - if the trap is on the ground and a badger decides it wants the food inside there is nothing we can do to stop it turning the trap over - no matter how many rocks and stones are placed to weigh the trap down the badger can easily knock them off and then will just bowl the trap over to get at the food. The only way to prevent the badger problem is to place the trap in a position where the badger cannot get to it - i.e. off the ground so we wire the trap in to a tree. Bait is placed in to a type of home made bird feeder which is then wired behind the pressure plate that activates the door mechanism which closes the trap. The photo shows a trap wired in to a tree in a wood typical of the terrain in which we operate.



Northern Red Squirrels

The volunteer group members of NRS have all been kept very busy this spring and summer with most groups reporting plenty of dispersing grey squirrels to control. I wonder if the increased numbers of greys culled could partly be due to the increased number of volunteers culling them and more vigilance by the general public to report their sightings? On my own land a rare sighting of a grey led to the trapping of 17 in total, 14 of which were adult males which had apparently been stuffing themselves at neighbouring pheasant feeders over the winter!

As promised, Red Squirrels Northern England have been working closely with Sally and I (joint-Chairpersons of NRS), keeping all of us informed of new developments and involving the volunteers in decision-making. Nick Mason, the RSNE Project Manager, met with the NRS Cumbria members in early June, giving a presentation of future plans and answering questions and concerns. He has had his work cut out to get his head rapidly around the intricacies of the Squirrel World and is doing a great job. Save Our Squirrels will still be existing just as a brand for a bit longer but as RSNE develops, SoS will be completely phased out. Jamie, Simon and Christine are now working for RSNE at least until the end of 2011 by which time it is hoped that funding options for RSNE will be a little clearer and new positions can be opened up. Work is now starting on a new RSNE website in which NRS volunteers from Cumbria and Northumberland have been invited to get involved with its development. NRS volunteers will also be consulted on amendments to the dreaded recording forms so that by January 2012, it is hoped to have a standard form which can be used by all!

Jackie Foott

Charitable status for WRSS

In late 2010 and early 2011 our volunteers spent a considerable amount of time preparing and submitting grant applications for funding for WRSS. The success rate for such applications to charitable trusts and similar has been estimated at around 20% at best, and that was before the sector was hit by the recession. Even where applications are successful, the timing of grant awards can make it difficult to plan ahead. In reviewing our fundraising policy it was decided that a steady source of income from charity collection boxes would act as a buffer against the ups and downs of applying for grant funding. The presence of WRSS charity boxes in shops, hotels and other businesses should also help to raise our profile and promote our cause across the area. With charitable status comes the additional boost of being able to claim Gift Aid for eligible donations and membership subscriptions. Also, some organisations, including some charitable trusts, are reluctant to donate to voluntary groups which are not registered as charities, on the basis that such groups have no regulatory oversight of their finances.

The decision has therefore been taken for WRSS to apply to become a registered charity. An EGM has been arranged for late September in order to make the necessary changes to the constitution, and members will receive notification of this in due course. WRSS will still continue to apply for grant funding as appropriate, and in fact two applications are currently in the pipeline. We hope to be able to bring news of successful outcomes in future issues of the *WRSS Newsletter*.

Helping WRSS

In addition to becoming a member or making a donation there are many other ways you can help with red squirrel conservation in our area. Let us know if you are interested in any of the following ways in which you can get involved.

- Administration
- Fundraising
- Publicity
- Manning stalls at shows and events
- Practical work with grey control

You can also help by reporting any sightings of red or grey squirrels in your garden. If you are lucky enough to have red visitors, you could put out a squirrel feeder for them. If you need any advice on feeding, contact us and we will put you in touch with Leon Barnes, who is in charge of supplementary feeding at WRSS.

To join our group, to report your sightings of red or grey squirrels, or to find out more about the Westmorland Red Squirrel Society, visit our website at: www.westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk

Or enquiries can be made to: Geoff Hetherington (Chairman), Side House Farm, Staveley, Kendal, Cumbria LA8 9AA. Telephone: 01539 822089 Mobile: 07836 584201 Email: geoff@westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk

Membership Application – Donation Form

Title Initials/First Name(s) Surname

Address

..... Postcode

Phone Email

Company Name (if applicable)

Please tick your membership option
Individual Membership @ £15 per annum*
Family Membership @ £25 per annum*
Corporate Membership @ £50 per annum*

**Membership Renewal – To keep administrative costs down, the Society has a membership renewal date of 1st April for all members. For those joining through the year, the following membership rates apply:
Joining Apr-Jul: Individual £15; Family £25; Corporate £50
Joining Aug-Nov: Individual £10; Family £15; Corporate £30
Joining Apr-Jul: Individual £5; Family £10; Corporate £20*

I enclose a donation of:

Total amount enclosed:

Please return this form with your cheque made payable to:

Westmorland Red Squirrel Society, Side House Farm, Staveley, Kendal, Cumbria, LA8 9AA

Thank you