

# WESTMORLAND RED SQUIRRELS

## Newsletter

Issue 9, Autumn 2014

Dr Craig Shuttleworth writes for us about the Anglesey Red Squirrel Project, telling how it is increasingly being recognised that conservation success is down to the efforts of local people and communities. The rest of our newsletter shows just how much effort our own volunteers and supporters here in the Westmorland area contribute towards saving our red squirrels - and it's just the tip of the iceberg. All this is translating into successes such as seeing reds again in Windermere and Troutbeck, something thought impossible just a few years ago. Thank you to everyone for your work and support – it is making a real difference. We are also an expanding community, and I would like to extend a very warm welcome to our new Brigsteer group, hoping that they too will soon be rewarded by a return of the reds.

Like other red squirrel groups, we are struggling to maintain a continuity of funding - conservation work like this takes many years, and if we let up now all our good work will be undone. By 2016 we will face a funding 'black hole' unless we can increase our revenue somehow. I am therefore appealing to all of you to think of more ways for us to raise the money we need to carry on, while at the same thanking everyone for their valiant fundraising efforts so far - they are very much appreciated. Government funding to support grey control is looking less and less likely as we still await the Secretary of State's decision on a new grey squirrel policy.

**Geoff Hetherington, Chairman**

### Red Squirrel Distribution

This RSNE map shows Red Squirrel presence in 2km squares from 2014 data up to the end of July.

The map is based on RSNE's own data combined with data supplied by WRS and Grasmere RSG.

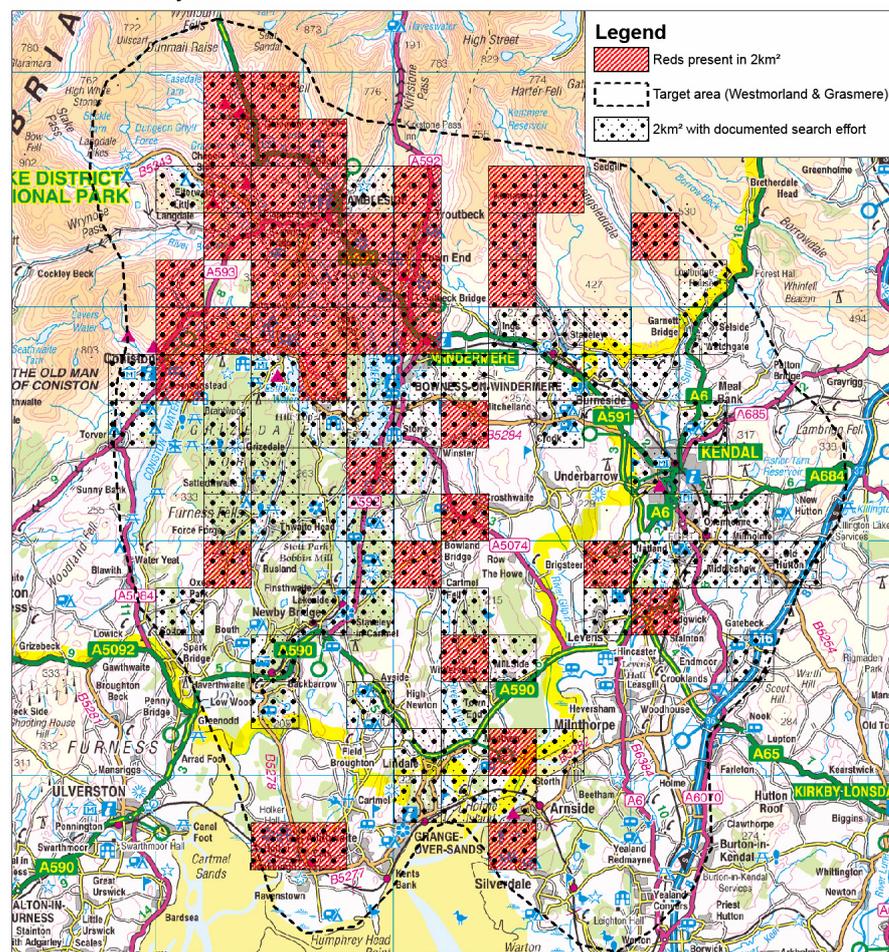
Search effort includes both monitoring and grey control activity.

Thank you for reporting your red sightings via the WRS website and letting us have your cull figures – these maps would not be possible without your help.

With the red sightings reported to us since the end of July, we hope to colour a few more of the squares red by the end of 2014.

Many thanks to RSNE for producing the map for us.

Recorded red squirrel presence & search effort in 2km<sup>2</sup> (Grasmere & Westmorland Group areas) between Jan and July 2014



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## Arnside and Silverdale

Our work in drafting a strategy for grey control and red squirrel conservation in the Arnside and Silverdale area has made good progress. A meeting with the major landowners in the area demonstrated strong support for a concerted approach and we agreed that the next step was to develop a costed plan of action, which we hope to finalise by November in time for a 2015 start. The amount of grey control already being carried out by the large private estates is very encouraging and this, together with one or two red sightings in the area this year, gives us genuine hope that a coordinated approach will quickly make a significant difference. I am also in touch with organisations such as the local natural history society, as well as individual trappers, who are keen to work with us.



Bob Cartwright – WRS Secretary

## South Cumbria Squirrel Management Forum

Grizedale and its surrounding areas between Coniston Water and Windermere, from Clappersgate in the north and Newby Bridge to the south, lie firmly in the territory of the Westmorland Red Squirrel Society. We are the leading voluntary organisation supporting and promoting squirrel management in the area.

Our Heritage Lottery funded Grizedale Project in 2011-13 made significant steps in identifying red squirrel populations, encouraging red and grey squirrel sightings and controlling grey squirrels. Since the end of the project we have been working with the Forestry Commission, landowners and other organisations to sustain a cooperative approach and to raise funds for continued management. To that end, we have established, and provide the secretariat for, the South Cumbria Squirrel Management Forum. Its purpose is to share expertise and experience and work together, where appropriate, in the interests of effective squirrel management. Members of the Forum, which is chaired by the Forestry Commission, include neighbouring Red Squirrel Groups, Red Squirrels Northern England (RSNE), the National Trust, the National Park Authority and Cumbria Wildlife Trust as well as major landowners, the Friends of the Lake District and the Red Squirrel Survival Trust.

We are also leading the squirrel-related initiatives contained in the local community's Heritage Lottery funded Rusland Horizons Cultural Landscape Scheme, which is due to start in 2016. In the meantime, we are developing, with the Forestry Commission, financial support and, under RSNE's leadership, a coordinated and reinvigorated programme of awareness raising and grey control, which we expect to begin early in 2015.

If you are interested in red squirrel conservation in this area and want to help or get involved go to our website [www.westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk](http://www.westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk) or contact me at [secretary@westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk](mailto:secretary@westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk) or telephone 015395 61514

**Bob Cartwright, Secretary**



## Best in Show!

We were delighted to win this magnificent rosette for the best trade stand at the 2014 Cartmel show. This is a fitting tribute for all the hard work Ian Hackett has put in to organising the shows and events we've attended, and to the efforts of all the others who have helped to man the stands throughout the year. We've notched up 16 events this year, with just one more to go. Come and meet us at the Apple and Fruit Weekend held at Beetham Nurseries, Sat 18<sup>th</sup> and Sun 19<sup>th</sup> October. See [www.beethamnurseries.co.uk](http://www.beethamnurseries.co.uk)

## Ambleside, Hawkshead, Coniston Area Overview

A disappointing start to the year with a case of Squirrel Pox Virus which fortunately resulted in only a single squirrel being affected, but it reminded us all as to why we continue to do what we do. The more reds we get back, the more road deaths and more reds contracting SQPV will result. We can do little about the road deaths but we can help with SQPV by reducing the number of greys and thus minimising the chances of contact with the reds.

All sites resulted in fewer greys being seen and caught and so the net was widened. Now we are operating in Great Tower Wood on the south eastern side of Lake Windermere which is a huge area, and co-operation from the Scouting Association who own the site has been much appreciated. Operations in Brockhole were also a first, and again there is much appreciation of the co-operation of all LDNPA staff. It helps with the overall picture by eliminating another area of potential breeding.

Normally the trapping season extends in to September but this year the new fruit was on the trees so much earlier and intensive trapping ceased in July.

The more success we have, the more people are willing to help. Residents offering to have a trap in their garden, which they monitor and advise us when activated, takes the pressure off our trappers, releasing them to carry out further activities in the woods.

It is most encouraging seeing the reaction of locals at the various shows we have a stand - interest is shown in the maps depicting where reds have been seen and it's very encouraging when individuals point out where they have seen reds in places over and above where we have known sightings marked. We are seeing reds in areas where they have not been seen for many years.

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## Windermere



Looking down over Windermere from the path to Orrest Head enables you to see large areas of woodland close to the town that were once home to red squirrels. It is only 18 months since we stepped up grey control in these wooded areas and with the co-operation of land owners and local householders we have managed to remove a large number of greys but of course newcomers can arrive at any time. However, reds have already started making a comeback and have been seen this year on a number of occasions in areas close to St Mary's church. Where these new arrivals eventually settle isn't known so we rely on members of the public to report reds whenever and wherever they see them. Several are obviously crossing our busy roads but amazingly we haven't yet received news of any road casualties. Please report any that you do see as these provide us with important data. On a positive note we can confirm that the woodland you can see in the picture, whilst not grey-free, is at least providing a much safer environment for reds than was the case 18 months ago. Grey control is ongoing and so we are hopeful that more reds will return in the coming year.

## South of Bowness

In June we were very excited to receive news of a red squirrel being spotted near Great Tower Wood. The little animal had very likely crossed the busy A592 as it was seen close to the lakeshore. There are many large areas of mature woodland south of Bowness and although heavily populated by greys there has been the occasional red sighting over the years. In 2015 we hope to concentrate more on this area and would like to thank the local land owners who are already offering us much needed help and assistance.

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## Kentmere and Staveley



The latest news from Kentmere is that baby red squirrels have been seen here in September, very near to the conifer plantation in the photo, which is due to be felled any day now. And a grey has been spotted on the top of Ill Bell! We've had two trappers working in the Kentmere and Staveley area as part of the National Park-funded 3 Valleys project, and their reports are below. In very late August a red squirrel was spotted just outside Staveley village, across the river from Staveley Mill Yard.

### Report by Jeff Scovell

I only started trapping in the Staveley area at the end of May so I had a limited amount of time in which to make a difference. It was fairly obvious from the start though that there were plenty of grey squirrels around Staveley, both in the woodlands around the village and also to the south. I covered an area running from Scroggs Farm in the north down to the Ashes Lane Caravan site in the south and about one mile wide. I caught a total of 125 grey squirrels over 2 months and although there were still some greys left at the end I think I accounted for most of them.

Unfortunately by the beginning of August although I could still attract greys to the feeders I was putting out, annoyingly they would not go into the traps. This is about a month earlier than normal and meant the trapping season came to an early end this year. There was no indication of red squirrels around Staveley, but I assume that was due to the large number of greys there. The nearest red squirrels are further up the Kentmere valley so hopefully this work will enable them to move back into Staveley.

### Report by Dave Marshall

I have been working as part of the Three Valleys project in Kentmere and Staveley.

I've completed three sessions in Craggy wood and Dorothy Farrers Wood just outside Staveley, and three sessions trapping, plus many more monitoring in the woodland behind the factory at Kentmere.

I successfully removed a good number of grey squirrels from all the woods I trapped and predictably by the third session the numbers found and trapped were much lower. I didn't find any reds in these woods but that is not to say they are not there, as we know for sure there are some reds in the area.

I used trail cameras and tester feeders right through the season as these make the trapping effort far more productive. The crop of hazel came a few weeks early this year and brought about an abrupt end to productive trapping but I hope to do some monitoring through the winter and hopefully find some reds.

## Two Reds are Better than One – Reds Return to the Troutbeck Valley!

by Jayne Musson

NUMBER ONE - 14/07/2014 - a red squirrel running towards me in the middle of the lane near our house. We live in Troutbeck Bridge near to the busy A591 - the last place I would have expected to see a red squirrel at 9.30 in the morning. It was nearly in our garden!

NUMBER TWO - 20/07/2014 - caught on camera at the far northern end of the Troutbeck valley.

The reds' return is due entirely to the local community working together. Thanks go to the grey squirrel spotters, the suppliers of plants and logs for the red squirrel stall in the village, donations in the boxes, Cumbria County Council for the grant for cameras, and the grey dispatchers.

A special thank you to Mr Brian Aston who worked tirelessly for many, many years on grey control in the Troutbeck Valley.

*Since this report was written there have been more red sightings reported throughout the Troutbeck valley.*



*Troutbeck red caught on camera*

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### Brigsteer Red Squirrel Meeting

CAN Brigsteer turn red? A thought-provoking question posed by Geoff Hetherington, chairman of the Westmorland Red Squirrel Society, at a meeting in Brigsteer village hall on 12 June 2014. Mr Hetherington presented a range of facts as to why red squirrel numbers have declined so rapidly, but how they could become a welcome sight in the Brigsteer area once more.

Trevor Cooper related the encouraging success story from nearby Grasmere whilst Rob Pocklington, ranger with the National Trust, outlined how the problem of invasive grey squirrels is being tackled in nearby woods. Villagers were asked to record sightings of red squirrels and to discourage the feeding of greys - the main threat to the survival of our native reds.

Since the meeting several new members have signed up and two squirrel traps have been loaned to Brigsteer residents. A local person has volunteered to dispatch any squirrels trapped. Meanwhile rangers at the nearby Sizergh Estate have recorded the culling of over 150 grey squirrels since controlling began in Jan 2013. This is the result of specific feeding areas being set up in quiet areas of the woodlands to attract them.



We now have our own Westmorland Red Squirrels Facebook page. It is updated several times a week so we can bring you the latest news about reds in our area.

**You don't need to be a member of Facebook to access it.**

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Westmorland-Red-Squirrel-Society/596596750409255>

## Anglesey Red Squirrel Project

by Craig Shuttleworth

In 1998 a list appeared in Wales. Issued by the Wales Squirrel Forum, it was based on assessments that were to herald Government owned conifer plantations becoming the only high priority sites for Welsh red squirrel conservation. The Forestry Commission Wales announced they would choose the top two of the identified localities to invest resources. Clocaenog forest was their first choice, but oddly they never made a second selection. As a result, they never committed resources elsewhere. Anglesey lounged as the site ranked fifth, a low priority because it had so much broadleaved woodland, and because the island held only a tiny fraction of the red squirrels found in Wales. Just 40 animals remained on the island. All were tucked away in a small forest nestled above the Red Wharf Bay and commanding a landscape containing thousands of grey squirrels.

In 2014, the priority list is now a forgotten circular, and the island has the largest and most genetically diverse population of red squirrels in Wales. There are 700 squirrels spread across the landscape, in gardens, in broadleaved woodland and in community parks. The reason for the conservation success is simple. The reason is the local people. People are the magic ingredient that never made it as a factor to be considered in any historical conservation rankings or assessments.



*2001 - the first Anglesey red squirrel photographed by a member of the public during the project*

Conservation is of course a dynamic business. Government reports are written, the latest buzz words emerge, 'best practice' is reshaped, and the conservation world revolves full circle and all too often enters a repeat phase.

Today however, red squirrel conservation increasingly recognizes the central role of communities and individuals. Many of those who make a career from red squirrel conservation can do as much, if not more, voluntary work than people classified simply within a 'volunteer' category because they earn a living doing another job.

In parallel, many of those volunteers who invest their spare time into local conservation build up more field experience than research scientists or squirrel project officers typically do. These individuals each offer unique perspectives on applied conservation. We therefore have to blur the edges of any categorisation, and recognise that successful conservation is about the range of skills, experiences and ideas of everyone involved.

On Anglesey, we were lucky enough to have Robert 'Bob' Lowe as the North Area manager of Countryside Council for Wales and Martin Gould of Forestry Commission Wales. They were two individuals who

pushed relentlessly for support and funding for the island squirrel project; often against wider established agency policy. Their contributions were as invaluable as those of Judith Moss, Raj Jones, Robert Macaulay, Sir Richard Williams Bulkeley, Ray & Val Parsons, Martin Bailey and an array of squirrel activists who invested time and energy into helping red squirrels and controlling greys.

The majority of these local people may remain anonymous behind the headline of island success, the red squirrel re-colonisation of 5000 acres of woodland across a 720 km<sup>2</sup> landscape, but they have evolved strategic grey squirrel eradication and have pushed policy in Wales away from conifer dominated landscapes. Their wider legacy is that communities across the Menai Straits are eager to conserve their local red squirrel populations, and in so doing will help eradicate greys from 90km<sup>2</sup> of mainland Gwynedd.



*Author trapping greys in 2012*



*Gwynedd trap training day with BASC in 2013*

The problem today is that those prioritising Government grant funding either suggest that the project is 'untypical of red squirrel conservation elsewhere in Wales', or oddly that culling grey squirrels is either 'not a priority action' or 'does not directly deliver benefits to the local environment'. So, just as in 1998, we have a scenario where Government financial resources go to their own coniferous forests elsewhere, and our local squirrel group are left to resource the project that will restore red squirrels back to parkland and native woodlands.

North Wales is of course not the only geography in the UK where a local squirrel group has achieved success and strives undaunted to try and achieve more. It was a real pleasure to be invited to the Westmorland AGM earlier this year, to hear the enthusiastic voices planning new trapping operations, and people reporting red squirrel returning to habitats from which they had been absent. It reinforced my long held view that the future red squirrel distribution maps will increasingly reflect where local people are prepared to take the lead as much as any habitat based assessment. Godspeed Westmorland Red Squirrel Group.

*Craig Shuttleworth has worked with landowners and communities across the UK to encourage the control of grey squirrels and restoration of native red squirrel populations. He lives in the mountains of the Snowdonia National Park with his wife and four children.*

## WRS Southern Area

By Dave Marshall

I've had a very busy summer trapping season again in the Southern area, mainly working in Lyth valley, Meathop, Lindale Chapel House, Grange and the extensive woodlands of Witherslack. With another of our trappers, Ken, we covered all the Witherslack woodlands that had been trapped in previous years. In most of the woods we have found very few or no greys and there has been more reactive trapping than ever before - this is a good sign. High and Low Park Woods, running beneath Whitbarrow Scar, have never been trapped before and we managed two sessions there this year, catching quite a few greys, but not finding nearly as many as expected.



KeepGuard 05-24-2014 15:34:18

*Red squirrel photographed at Foulshaw during RSNE's 2014 Spring monitoring programme*

I always have a walk around Halecat woods at this time of year, using the same route looking for signs of grey squirrels feeding by spotting chewed hazel nut shells on the track. Last week I found none at all, and there is a huge crop of hazel, so this and the monitoring over the summer means the greys are at their lowest levels here since I started in red squirrel conservation - this is brilliant news.

A big success over the last two seasons is Meathop. I try to go to the monthly meetings of the Grange and Meathop Woodlanders group, and have worked with many of their woodland owners. Greys are now at their lowest numbers in Meathop for many years, and there has been one red sighting this year. There are still reds in Ulpha Wood, and I now have permission to trap and monitor there so hopefully by next year we will have a better picture. Ruth and Steven M. own a nice little wood at Meathop, and Steve has been setting the traps and notifying me when squirrels are caught. Steve has become a very good trapper, and come up with a slightly different but very successful trapping method that is certainly worth trying.



*Steve's angled trap method*

The trap is wired into a tree positioned at a steep angle, almost vertical, with the door at the top and with an in-trap feeder in place, so the squirrel has to go down into the trap. In Steve's group of 4 traps, 9 out of 10 times the trap that catches a squirrel is the one set at this steep angle. I have experimented myself with two traps side by side in trees, one sloped like this and one in the conventional level position, and the greys nearly always go for the sloping trap.

It's a very easy method, so worth anyone giving it a go. I'll be very interested to know how people get on.

### Westmorland Red Squirrel Society

Registered Charity No: 1144416

To find out more or to join our group – please give us a call or check out our website

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