

WESTMORLAND RED SQUIRREL SOCIETY

Newsletter

Issue 4 Spring 2012

Well - what a fantastic year 2011 has been! If 2012 turns out to be half as good, I'm sure we will all be very happy. There are just so many people to thank for this. To thank everyone individually would probably take up the whole newsletter, so I would like to extend my personal thanks and appreciation to you all - the input of each one of you is important in knitting together the whole project.

To see red squirrels expanding outwards from places where we have identified them is very heartening, as is the ever increasing number of people joining our group - I would like to offer a very warm welcome to all our new members. It shows that the more we spread the word, the more people will understand what is needed to make a difference for our red squirrels.

We are still concentrating on our three main core areas, but other project areas are springing up too. The Grasmere & Rydal area Woodland Grant Scheme and the new Grizedale Red Squirrels project are two examples described in articles in this newsletter. I'm sure these schemes will benefit our red squirrels, and with Dave M (an experienced volunteer) involved with the Grizedale project, it has every chance of success. On 25 October 2011 WRSS became a registered charity, registration number: 1144416. This will enable us to take advantage of Gift Aid on membership subscriptions and donations as well as having charity collection boxes placed in local shops and businesses.

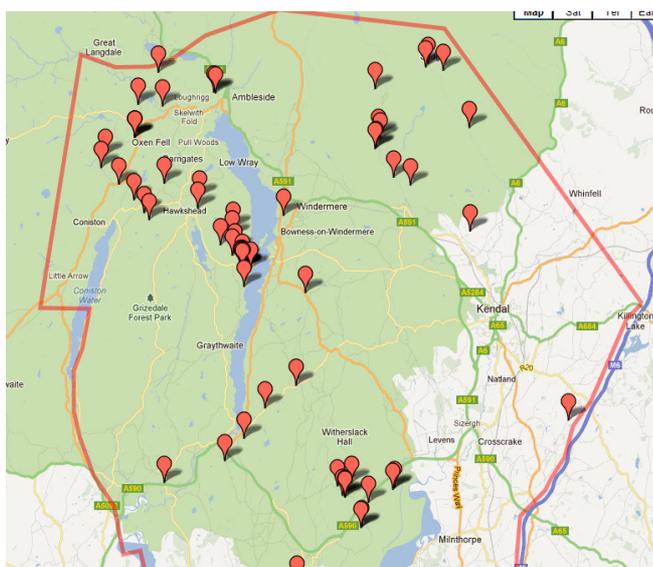
Geoff Hetherington, Chairman

WRSS records

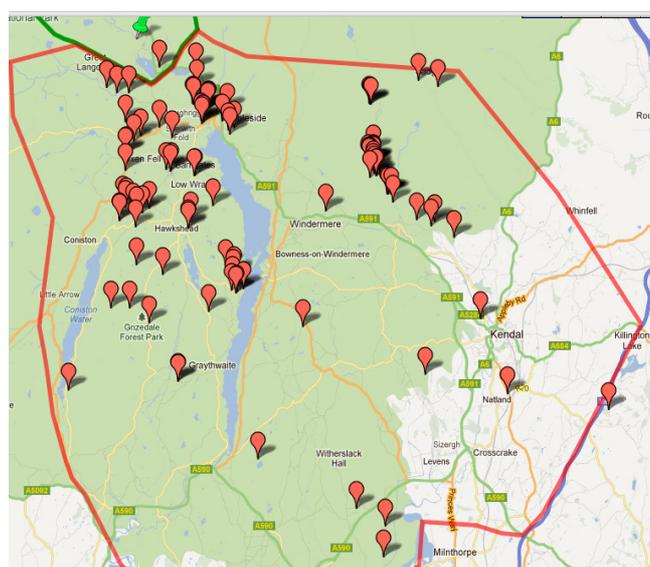
Our reported red sightings are vital to show where our red squirrels are in need of protection – many thanks to all of you who have taken the trouble to send in this data.

The maps below give an idea of the (minimum) range of our red squirrel population. It is great to see how sightings have significantly increased from 2010 to 2011.

Note - the markers do not indicate the density of squirrel population at the sightings, to get more detail of individual markers (numbers seen, date and specific location) look on the WRSS website. www.westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk



2010 Sightings Map



2011 Sightings Map

Area Reports

Witherslack

Since the last news letter it has been autumn and winter which is the hardest time of the year to catch the grey squirrels. Unlike most animals who are hungry through the winter and will flock to any supplementary food source, squirrels will ignore food in traps and feast on all the nuts and seeds they have stashed away (squirreled away) in autumn. So winter is not the time to trap but the time to shoot so this is what I have been up to.

Grey squirrels are certainly less in number in the woodlands of Witherslack and are not being seen very much at all (great!) but they are still about and as always they keep recolonising certain areas of woodland which seem to attract them so must be favourable habitat for them, this makes it easier for us to control them. In a few weeks the trapping season will be under way again and by autumn 2012, I will have a good idea of where we are in the project but I am optimistic that we have reduced the greys sufficiently to allow any reds who want to reclaim some of the deciduous woods to do so. **Dave Marshall**



Longsleddale squirrel – Feb 2012

Ambleside and Langdale

A quiet period since the last newsletter, as little activity when the new fruit arrives on the trees until early new year. Started earlier than normal this year because we suspected the greys were breeding earlier due to the mild winter. Had limited success initially and then shut down totally during the intense cold spell as a trapped animal would have difficulty surviving in a trap under such cold conditions and we must control the grey in the most effective humane manner we can - they never asked to come here. Over the whole of our area we are seeing fewer greys and more reds than in many years - in some areas over the last 2 months there have been more sightings of reds than greys which is most encouraging - early days but it does appear that our concerted efforts over a number years are starting to show positive results. We hope this continues.

Michael Nurse

Kentmere & Longsleddale

This area is showing signs of real success with red squirrels appearing in many locations from the top of Longsleddale down through the valley, in and around the woodlands between the two valleys and then on up the Kentmere valley. One of our volunteers, Mike H, has made a real difference in the area at the foot of the valleys, and with the other volunteers on board, this year should show a real improvement. Young reds have appeared at the top of Longsleddale and I had the pleasure of reds returning to my own woods after an absence of many years. In Kentmere, fewer greys are being sighted up the valley, and already this year there have been two separate sightings of three reds seen together. We know there are still some residual greys, particularly towards the southern end, and the people who live and work in the valley are helping us to keep track of the situation by regularly reporting their sightings. It just shows what can be achieved, but there is still a lot more work to do, so let's not get complacent.

Geoff Hetherington.



Kentmere squirrel – Feb 2012

Foulshaw and Meathop Moss

The areas of conifer woodlands which contain red squirrels in Witherslack belong to Cumbria Wildlife trust and the sites at Foulshaw and Meathop moss are in the process of being clear felled as part of the bog restoration project. Meathop moss is finished and has barely any trees left so the reds which were there (and there were some last summer) must have moved onto new woods so this could be Foulshaw moss, Ulpha fell, Meathop woodlands or to Nichols Moss (if they got across the A590).

Nichols Moss is actually the safest area as it is not under threat of being clear felled. CWT only own a small part and have already done that bit, the rest is under ownership of several owners and is now being managed by a newly formed private owners group and although it is early days it seems none of these have any intention of clear felling and want to keep the large mature pines around the edges while looking after the wetter parts as a bog.

There is no way of knowing exactly where the Meathop moss reds went but they are out of luck if they went to Foulshaw. There have been three sightings of reds on Foulshaw since the felling started, one in a clear felled area, one in trees due to be felled and sadly a dead one, again in a clear fell part (decayed so cause of death difficult to determine).

Area Reports



Foulshaw Moss clear felled

Foulshaw and Meathop Moss (continued)

The only parts of these reserves (CWT owned parts) left standing are Ulpha fell and wood which are mixed woodlands, the scientific project carried out last year included a good amount of grey control but this will need to be carried out every year if there is any chance for them. As the vast woodlands of Foulshaw, which held a pool of red squirrels, are in the process of being removed, it's looking grim. If the trees are removed to the same extent as on Meathop moss I can't see how a population of reds can possibly survive on Foulshaw which is really sad and in my most pessimistic moments I fear it will be the end of red squirrels in this area. Time will tell. **Dave Marshall**

Foulshaw Moss Project Update

The studies on squirrels at Foulshaw Moss commissioned by Cumbria Wildlife Trust (CWT) that started in 2011 will continue throughout 2012. Trees are currently being felled and removed from parts of the site to restore it to lowland raised mire. The woodlands to the west of the site at Ulpha Fell and Ulpha Wood on Foulshaw are being kept as havens for the small resident red squirrel population. The studies on squirrels by Queen Mary, University of London aim to monitor the effects of the restoration work on the red squirrels and on the removal of grey squirrels moving into the area. Grey squirrel control will again take place throughout the year (2012). Recommendations for future management options for red squirrels at Foulshaw will be discussed with CWT at the end of the project early in 2013. **John Gurnell and Peter Lurz**

Grizedale Questionnaire

Results of a survey taken at Dentdale Show, Grizedale Forest, Westmorland Show and Arnside WI between 27th August and 8th September 2011. 201 Surveys were completed. Q1 and Q2 were about location, age and gender. Location split (Cumbria and Non-Cumbria) below.

3. Did you know that the Red Squirrel is a protected species in the UK?

Cumbria 95% Yes

Non-Cumbria 94% Yes

Total 95% Yes

4. Did you know that it is the Grey Squirrel which poses the biggest threat to the survival of Red Squirrels in the UK?

Cumbria 94% Yes

Non-Cumbria 91% Yes

Total 92% Yes

5. Did you know that conservation work to protect Red Squirrels involves controlling Greys to keep the 2 species apart?

Cumbria 90% Yes

Non-Cumbria 79% Yes

Total 85% Yes

6. Would you support targeted Grey control to protect Red Squirrels?

Cumbria 88% Yes

Non-Cumbria 94% Yes

Total 92% Yes

7. Have you seen a wild Red Squirrel in England in the last 10 years?

Cumbria 68% Yes

Non-Cumbria 56% Yes

Total 62% Yes

8. There are Red Squirrels in Grizedale Forest. Do you think that we should do as much as possible to help them survive?

Cumbria 99% Yes

Non-Cumbria 98% Yes

Total 99% Yes

9. Would you be more likely to visit Grizedale Forest if there was a good chance of seeing a Red Squirrel?

Cumbria 78% Yes

Non-Cumbria 84% Yes

Total 81% Yes

10. Would you like to see more information about Red Squirrels and their conservation in the Forest and other wildlife friendly places in Cumbria?

Cumbria 93% Yes

Non-Cumbria 96% Yes

Total 95% Yes

Any other comments:

- It is so special to see a native red squirrel and I'd love my children to have the chance to do so
- Sadly we in Lancs have the greys
- Get rid of greys please!
- Discourage people from feeding grey squirrels
- Been looking for wild red squirrels in Cumbria for two years to no avail

The following article is by Robin Page, a staunch red squirrel conservation supporter. Robin is the Chairman of the Countryside Restoration Trust, a farming and conservation charity which aims to protect and restore Britain's countryside through wildlife friendly and commercially viable land management. On behalf of the WRSS I would like to extend to Robin a very big thank you for his recent substantial donation. **Geoff Hetherington**

NUTS ABOUT SQUIRRELS

I made a serious mistake the other day: I went to Norfolk without wearing my longjohns. The wind was whistling across the wide-open spaces, clouds rolled overhead, varying in colour from the threatening to the very threatening, and when the rain came down it fell in sheets. Despite this, it was a wonderful day - a beautiful day, even - and there was so much going on that I didn't realise that my lower half was completely numb until I attempted to sit.



The enclosures at Mayfields

It was the day that the Countryside Restoration Trust (CRT) launched its captive red squirrel breeding programme at its Mayfields smallholding at Themelthorpe, a hamlet in Norfolk. What a day. A good crowd gathered - including several Shooting Times readers. They had come from all over East Anglia and there was even an enthusiast from London who had never seen a red squirrel before. He has now.

A native species under threat

The pair of squirrels, Widgeon and Warren, has been given luxury accommodation in a hedge, and their two luxury penthouses have been built around the trunks of two fine hedgerow oak trees and connected by an overhead tunnel. The penthouses have plenty of room for eating, sleeping and we hope, breeding - which is the purpose of the whole exercise. The snow leopard, the Siberian tiger and the white rhino may all be endangered, but our native red squirrel is also under threat, and it constantly amazes me that our own conservation organisations and quangos do not take the threats to it more seriously. Where are you Natural England, the Wildlife Trusts, RSPB, DEFRA, and yes, wait for it - Countryfile? Why this indifference? The answer may well be a warped view of animal rights taking precedence over conservation. The simple truth is that to protect the red squirrel before vaccines have been developed, grey squirrels must be controlled to protect the reds, and several so-called conservationists have neither the courage nor the integrity to support this - shame on them. One of the worst offenders is the RSPB, and yes, I am still a member. The problem is that not only is the grey squirrel larger and more aggressive than the red - leading to confrontation and harassment - but also the grey squirrel carries squirrel pox, which is virtually harmless to greys, but almost always fatal to reds. As a result, Britain's red squirrel population is now down to 120,000 and falling. The grey squirrel population is three million and rising. Because of this, my fellow CRT trustees - including the great Norfolk character, farmer, naturalist and wildlife photographer, Chris Knights - decided that we would do our bit by captive breeding red squirrels, so that any offspring appearing could help in various reintroduction programmes planned (and so far unplanned) for Britain. One of my unplanned hopes is that later on we can start releasing red squirrels back into Norfolk.

An unsung wildlife hero

David Stapleford, one of Britain's great unsung wildlife heroes, performed our launch ceremony. David is a retired teacher and for more than 40 years, in his spare time, he has pioneered the captive breeding of both red squirrels and dormice in the hope that when conditions improved, they can be released back into the wild. He is such a modest man - almost too modest - and why he has never received an "honour" I will never know. I am always irritated as assorted so-called celebrities, sports stars and political donors troop up to get their trivialised "gongs". David, who has done something both important and useful, has been forgotten. Roll on the day when he becomes Sir David, or even Lord Stapleford of Dreyside.

The squirrels are in the care of the CRT's star tenants - Norfolk girl Sarah Jenkins and her daughter Megan. They are both gifted sheepdog handlers - Sarah is not far off the England team and Megan is an up-and-coming star. Their affinity with animals has meant they have quickly taken to looking after their red guests, and the enthusiasm of both is contagious. David has guided them forward, as has Chrissie Kelley, already a star of the wildlife world. Chrissie oversees the successful red squirrel programme at nearby Pensthorpe Nature Reserve in Norfolk and my advice to anybody living in, or visiting, the Fakenham area would be to visit Pensthorpe. The squirrels are wonderful and so are the birds, the gardens and, dare I say it, the puddings in the cafe.



Megan Jenkins, Robin Page, Sarah Jenkins and David Stapleford

Once David had pulled the cord and revealed the memorial plaque, I started to feel worried. With such a throng, I thought the squirrels would not show themselves, or at best give everybody merely a fleeting view. How wrong I was: upon hearing Megan's voice, they put on such a display of squirrel dexterity and vanity that I was astonished. In fact it was more than astonishment, I was gobsmacked.

They ran, climbed, jumped and posed, which was perfect: several people who had never seen indigenous red squirrels before became instant converts to the cause. So, we had a fantastic day and all those there will have been convinced as I am, that we are doing the right thing - breeding in captivity until responsible and safe release into the wild can be achieved.



David Stapleford unveiled a plaque commemorating the launch of the CRT's captive red squirrel breeding programme



Red squirrel at Mayfields

Now for my masterplan. In my teenage years, I was a regular beater on a shoot in Breckland Forest, where two uncles were members of a syndicate. They were fantastic days trudging through that beautiful forest with wilderness, bramble thickets, bogs, sunlit silver birches, and yes, red squirrels.

The only downside was that I hated seeing roe deer blasted with 12 bores, and I am glad that was later stopped. I have to confess, too, that I always found woodcock and snipe too beautiful that if I had been a Gun, I would have chosen not to pull the trigger - and my feelings remain the same to this day.

Plans for re-introduction

Thetford Forest is 71,500 acres in size and is now full of grey squirrels, with all the reds having died of squirrel pox or having been driven out by the greys. As far as I am aware, there is not one wild red squirrel left in East Anglia, though there is a plan to introduce them to Mersea Island in Essex - not perfect, but it is a start, and islands are always the easiest to clear of greys.

Believe it or not, the grey invasion of Thetford Forest is the fault of the Forestry Commission. Its experts said that grey squirrels did not like conifers and would therefore stay out of the forest and the reds would be safe. How mindblowingly stupid was that?

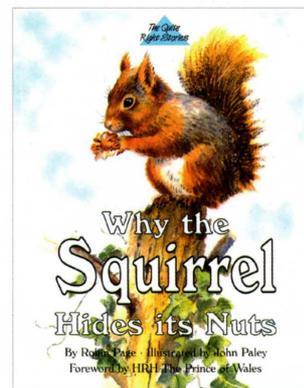
I believe that DEFRA should now encourage the Forestry Commission to clear Thetford of greys: it could be done with proper gamekeeping. In addition, surrounding landowners should be required to control grey squirrels as a matter of "cross-compliance" - if they don't control grey squirrels, they don't receive subsidies; control greys and they receive subsidies. It is as simple as that. Grey control as a matter of cross-compliance already ought to be in place in Cumbria and Northumberland, but for reasons best known to DEFRA it is not.

Oh, and a little message to the RSPB: red squirrels do not live at such high densities as greys and are not so destructive, so clear the greys from Thetford Forest and bird life would increase almost instantly.

For further information about the CRT, visit www.countrysiderestorationtrust.com.

This article first appeared in the 1 February 2012 edition of the Shooting Times & Country Magazine

Buy Robin Page's new book 'Why the Squirrel Hides its Nuts' and help save the **red squirrel**.



Enjoy another of 'The Quite Right Stories' - ideal for all children aged between 6 and 106. The British **red squirrel** is under huge pressure. **50p** from each copy sold will go directly to **red squirrel** conservation.

'Why the Squirrel Hides its Nuts' is in full colour with illustrations by John Paley.

Send **£5.50** plus **£1** for post & packaging to Bird's Farm Books, Haslingfield Road, Barton, Cambs, CB23 7AG.

Health & Safety Warning: This story contains nuts.

Funding news

We are very pleased to announce that this year our application to the Grey Control Fund was successful and we were awarded £750 towards red squirrel conservation in the Ambleside & Langdale area. This funding enabled us to make a much earlier start this year, in February, although the bad weather did then bring things to a halt for a time.

It is intended that the areas covered by this early start will complement efforts by the Red Squirrels Northern England project to work with landowners just to the north, in the Grasmere /Rydal /Loughrigg area, to secure Woodland Improvement Grant (WIG) funding from the Forestry Commission to carry out grey control within the southern tip of the Thirlmere red squirrel stronghold.

WRSS will continue to apply for funding from other sources. We welcome the focus on the area between Lakes Windermere & Coniston - we hope that with the continuing and increasing support of official bodies and funders, local businesses, landowners, residents and the general public we will have an opportunity to make a real difference for our red squirrels there, and to provide further protection for those reds within the red squirrel stronghold to the north. However, in total WRSS covers an area roughly the size of Anglesey and in terms of resources and funding we cannot afford to neglect the red squirrels that we know are elsewhere in SE Cumbria – in the Kentmere and Longsleddale valleys, around Witherslack and in other pockets throughout our area.

We have recently received the wonderful news that WRSS has been awarded a 'Your Heritage' grant for two years of red squirrel conservation in Grizedale Forest. See the flyer reprinted below for full details.

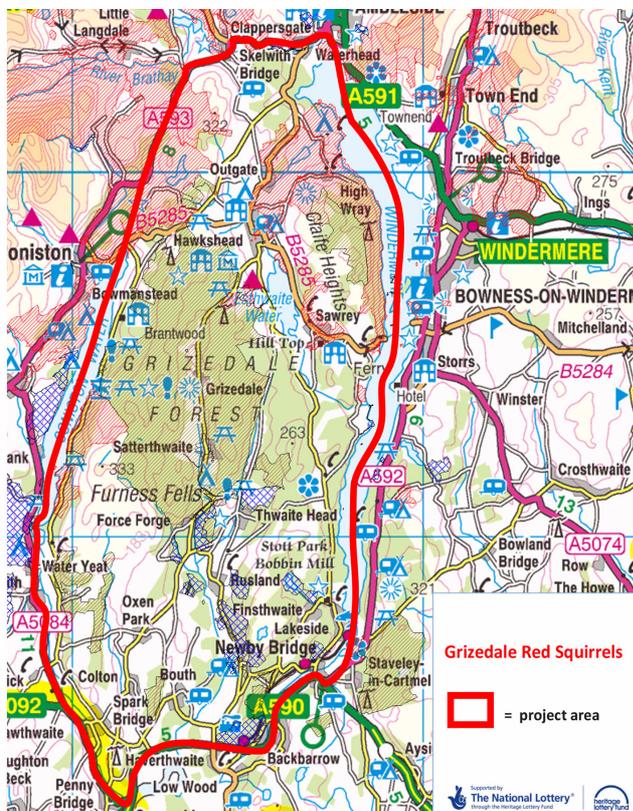
Grizedale Red Squirrels

The Westmorland Red Squirrel Society has received a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for an exciting two-year Grizedale Red Squirrels project in the Lake District. The focus will be to conserve and strengthen the remaining red squirrel populations in the Grizedale area so that they can be enjoyed by the general public and by future generations.

Red squirrels are our only native squirrel but have been displaced from most of England by the introduced American grey. Cumbria is one of the last strongholds for this charming animal, characterised as 'Squirrel Nutkin' by Beatrix Potter who gave the Lake District a unique heritage with her stories and illustrations.



Photo - Alan Heeley



This will be the first time that a red squirrel project led by volunteers from the local community will include a working partnership between the Forestry Commission, the Lake District National Park Authority, Cumbria Wildlife Trust, National Trust, Red Squirrels Northern England, Red Squirrel Survival Trust, landowners and members of the general public.

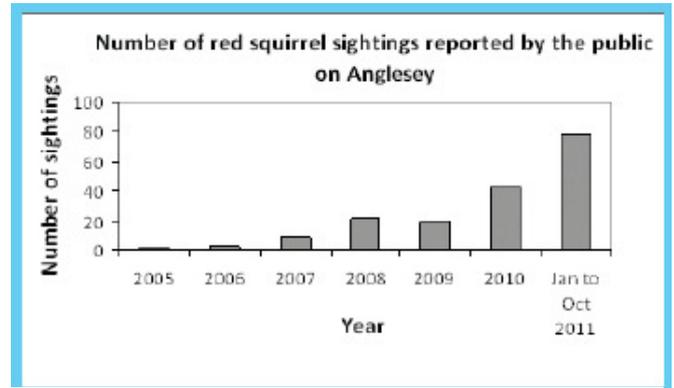
If you live, work, visit or have any connections in or around the area shown on the map, please contact WRSS to get involved. Help is needed within each community for active grey control, monitoring and just for sending sightings of red squirrels. Please contact Jackie at: grizedale@westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk or phone 015396 25453.

News From Other Areas

Friends of the Anglesey Red Squirrels Trust

Down in the woods today...

Red squirrels are colonising more of Anglesey (and, more recently, Gwynedd), and we are receiving an increased volume of sightings. We always welcome news about red or grey squirrels, and many people have telephoned or emailed to let us know what they've seen, and when and where. In 2003, the red squirrel could be found only in the depths of the coniferous stands in Mynydd Llwydiarth (Pentraeth forest). However, in 2011, squirrels are now widespread and gracing boughs in majestic woodlands throughout the south and west of the island. In 2005, we had only two red squirrel sightings reported, while in 2011 we have had almost 80 in less than ten months.



Red Squirrels return to Treborth

Keen local naturalist Emlyn Jones, a regular walker in the woods at Bangor University's Treborth Botanic Garden, made an observation on April 14, 2011 that may come to have real significance in the struggle to regain Welsh red squirrel territory: two red squirrels chasing each other around the trunk of a Turkey Oak along the new Coast Path for Wales, which now allows pleasant access to the Botanic Garden's Strait-side wood.

This welcome sighting followed hard on the heels of singletons seen on other dates in April 2011, as well as individual records by other observers over the preceding 18 months, suggesting a tentative re-colonisation of the southern shores of Menai Strait's central stretch.



I say re-colonisation, remembering as if it were yesterday my one and only sighting of red at Treborth in Sept 1976. With a mouthful of hazelnut, it scampered among bush to bush at the sunny woodland margin opposite the curator's house, before disappearing for 33 years.

So, when a red squirrel was live trapped at Treborth, examined and released by Craig Shuttleworth in the autumn of 2009 (as part of a rigorous attempt to rid the Garden of grey squirrel and establish a cordon-sanitaire on the mainland adjacent to the expanding red squirrel population on Anglesey), the news was rightly hailed as a major shift in the aspirations of red squirrels and their protectors. Here was firm evidence of reds attempting to establish in mixed woodland on the mainland of Wales, a feat not achieved by any other extant population of reds.

Grasmere Red Squirrels

1) News of the reds

BAD NEWS – we have just had confirmation that a red recovered from White Moss on Christmas Eve had the Squirrelpox virus. We have taken the feeder/traps in from White Moss. We have had the pox before in 2002, 2003 and 2007. In each case the reds recovered. Hopefully it won't spread to other parts of Grasmere.

Apart from this 2011 has been a great year for the reds in Grasmere with a significant increase in numbers especially at White Moss and more sightings at Helmside and the central village.

2) Tackling the greys

Over the year the number of greys was 22% down with a total of 130 for 2011 (the 2010 total was 166).

Here is my interpretation of the data. The greys enter our area from Rydal to the SE and Elterwater/Skelwith/Langdale over Red Bank to the SW. The odd one may come over the fells from Langdale. We are also pretty certain they do not come from the East (Patterdale) or the North (Thirlmere). Our strategy is to concentrate trapping on cordons across the entry corridors.

The proportion of greys shot rather than trapped has increased to 59% in 2011 from 30% in 2010. There are several reasons for this: at any one time there are more reds than greys so trapping is a problem as reds tend to rush into them but the greys are more wary in what is a new territory to them. The greys avoid traps in the autumn. We have video showing them walking past a baited trap! We now have permission to shoot in more woodlands and this will have increased the numbers compared to last year.

130 is still a high number and we hope that there will be an increased amount of grey control on the other side of Red Bank and more generally in Rydal and Langdale in 2012. I hope to have more news about this in the next newsletter.

Grasmere RSG has accounted for a total of 24 greys in Rydal and Langdale in 2011

Collecting Boxes

As we are now a registered charity the opportunity has opened for collecting boxes to be considered. With this in mind the society intends to launch such a scheme in early March.

The scheme will be organised by Trustees and volunteers and will have boxes in a number of shops etc. that have already shown interest in supporting us.

We hope that the scheme will flourish and provide valuable funding for our conservation work. If any member has connections with possible sites where boxes could be hosted please let us know and we can follow it up with you.

We have had a special label designed by Neil Salisbury of Betty Fold incorporating Beatrix Potter images, in line with the newly published society leaflets.

Leon Barnes



Membership Application - Donation Form

Title _____

Initial/first name(s) _____

Surname _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Tel _____

Email _____

Company _____

Please tick your selected options £

Individual membership @ £15 per annum* _____

Family membership @ £25 per annum* _____

Corporate membership @ £50 per annum* _____

I/we enclose a donation of _____

Total amount enclosed _____

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Please tick this box if you are a UK taxpayer and would like WRSS to claim Gift Aid on your subscriptions and donations.

I would like the tax reclaimed on any eligible donations and subscriptions that I have ever made or will make to WRSS until I notify you otherwise. I confirm that I pay an amount of UK income or capital gains tax at least equal to the tax that WRSS will reclaim in any tax year.

Signed _____ Date _____

Please return this form with your cheque made payable to:

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

*Membership renewal is 1st April. The following rates apply when joining later in the year:

Joining	Individual	Family	Corporate
Apr-Jul	£15	£25	£50
Aug-Nov	£10	£15	£30
Dec-Mar	£5	£10	£20

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.



Photo - Alan Heeley

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