



Westmorland Red Squirrels



## Annual Review 2017



Welcome to our first Annual Review. At the beginning of this year we decided to replace our twice yearly Newsletters with this annual report and a more regular E-News issue

every two months. We've had great feedback on this way of keeping you, our members and partners, abreast of what we're up to and what else is going on in 'squirrel world'.

This Review brings together the highlights of 2017 and will hopefully whet your appetite for the year ahead. In it you'll find out about the great work being done on the ground by our fantastic volunteers and contractors. You'll also discover the many and various ways in which we're working with landowners and

partners locally, regionally and nationally to deliver the best possible future for our red squirrels.

Above all, I hope it will encourage you to continue to support our work. In 2017 our membership exceeded 300 for the first time. The number of reported red squirrels sightings in our area more than doubled. And there were at least 3940 fewer grey squirrels. Remember, we can't do it without you!

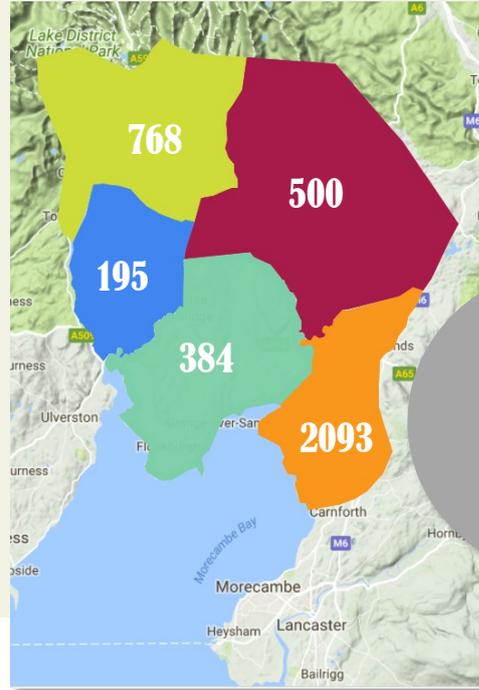
**Geoff Hetherington, Chairman**

*Making the future safe for our red squirrels*

# 2017 in a nutshell

## Squirrels

**457**  
reds reported



**3940**  
greys caught

## Events, meetings and publicity



We had a stand at  
**16**  
local events

*Photo Westmorland Agricultural Society*

We attended

**34 meetings**

**13 internal meetings**  
including 4 trustee meetings, 1 AGM, 2 with Red Squirrels Northern England & Grasmere Red Squirrel Group

**13 external meetings**  
including 4 with Northern Red Squirrels, 2 with the South Cumbria Squirrel Management Forum and 3 in London

**3 public meetings**  
in Rusland, Kendal and Coniston

**2 conferences**  
in Belfast and York

**3 media interviews**  
with Cumbria Magazine, Border Television and North West Evening Mail

**13 talks**  
given to local groups



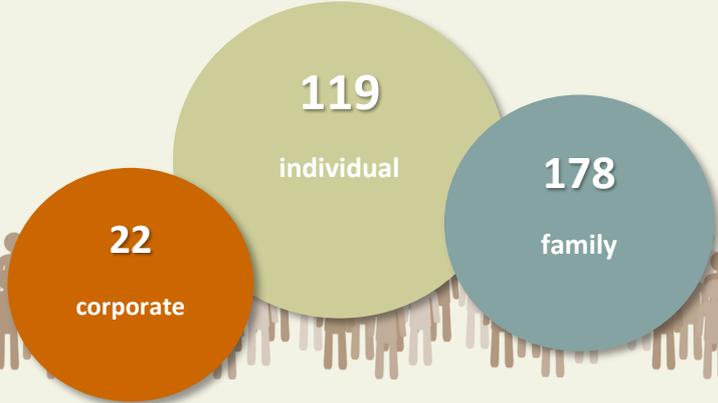
 410 followers on twitter

 1,141 likes on Facebook

 608 subscribers to our E-News

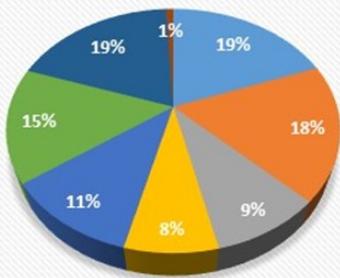
**Members** at the end of 2017

**319** members



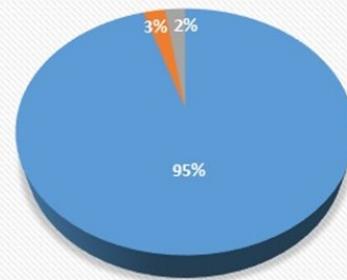
**Financials** for the 2017 calendar year.

**Income**



- Membership - 19%
- Donations - 18%
- Collection Boxes - 9%
- Sponsorship - 8%
- Gift Aid - 11%
- Fundraising - 15%
- Grants - 19%
- Other Income - 1%

**Expenditure**



- Red Squirrel Conservation & Grey Control - 95%
- Administration & Insurance - 3%
- Publicity & Merchandise - 2%

Our most recently published accounts for the financial year 2016/17 show income as £32,496 and expenditure as £26,494

**Some of our 2017 reds**



## AGM

John Martin gave us a fascinating insight to the ecology of pine martens on the basis of his extensive research into their diet, habitat and breeding patterns in Dumfries and Galloway. There, at least, it seems they mainly eat nuts, fruit and voles. Neither red nor grey squirrels feature significantly in their diet.

In other news, Geoff Hetherington was re-elected to the Chair and we welcomed Gail Armstrong from Silverdale as a trustee.



## Remotis

We're always looking to use our volunteers' time efficiently and one tool that we've tested with great success this year is the Remoti®.

This clever piece of kit sends a signal to a mobile phone if the trapdoor is triggered. The trappers can then respond and dispatch the trapped grey quickly and humanely, with a minimum of stress.



## Grasmere

Grasmere has its own very effective red squirrel group but we collaborate on many aspects of squirrel management including grey control and securing community and business support for resident red squirrels. This year we have been concerned by

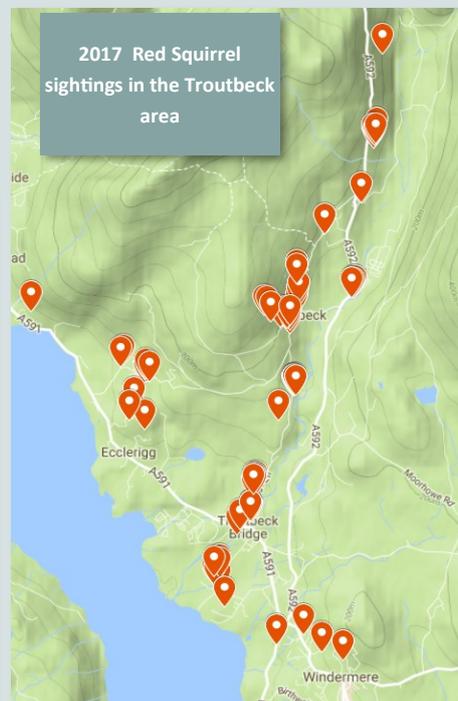
## Ambleside and Langdale

"It's been a strange year" was the common refrain as greys were fairly scarce throughout the traditional trapping season, only to turn up in numbers in the autumn.

Nonetheless, our volunteers have again covered the ground comprehensively. A close relationship with the University of Cumbria led to a number of students volunteering to assist with monitoring and trapping.

### Reds return

But it's not so many years ago that the idea of red squirrels returning to the area around the Lake District National Park's Visitor Centre at Brockhole was just a pipe dream.



Now, thanks to the hard work and determination of our volunteers to remove grey squirrels, the reds are once again being spotted along the length of the Troutbeck valley and beyond, with litters of kits born at both ends of the valley in 2017.

further outbreaks of squirrel pox virus in the area, apparently due to infected greys entering the area from the south. We have intensified our control in the Rydal and Langdale areas using volunteers and by working with a ranger from Red Squirrels Northern England. At the

## Troutbeck

Troutbeck continues to offer a model of community commitment to red



squirrels. Thanks to the active involvement of most residents and landowners, red squirrels continue to thrive.

We spoke at the Troutbeck Village Association's annual meeting and had stalls at the Heritage Day and Christmas Fair.

## Windermere

Our volunteers are building up support from Windermere residents and landowners and keeping grey numbers down. Fewer reds were spotted in and around Windermere in 2017, but we're hoping for more in 2018.

## Coniston and Torver

This new group grew from a well-attended public meeting in October. Since then we have established an active local sub-group and had many landowners and residents come on board. Their willingness to host traps, report cull figures and encourage red squirrel sightings is heartening and we expect to deliver great results in 2018.

end of the year we successfully applied for an 'emergency grant' from the Lake District National Park's Community Fund but in future will need to find new ways of meeting the cost if we're to prevent further incursions.

## Red Squirrels United

Red Squirrel United is a Heritage Lottery funded programme to test public attitudes to squirrel management but also engage local communities in several parts of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland in protecting reds and controlling greys. Regrettably, none of the project areas directly benefits us, though we hope to gain knowledge and learn best practice from others. Two members attended the RSU Knowledge Fair in Northern Ireland in 2017.



## National Trust

The Trust is an important landowner in our area, placing considerable value on managing its woodlands for conservation and recreation. We have an excellent working relationship with the Trust's managers and field staff and have their authority to trap greys in their woodlands and, in certain locations, licence to shoot greys.

## Lake District National Park Authority

While the Authority has disposed of some of its woodlands at Newby Bridge and near Ambleside this year it retains substantial landholdings in the Rusland valley, near Finsthwaite and at Staveley, as well as Brockhole on Windermere. We have licences to trap and shoot greys on all of their woodlands. Reds have been seen near the National Park Visitor Centre at Brockhole on Windermere and in Haverthwaite Woods, which is encouraging.

## Central Area

### Kendal

We continue to tackle the greys as best we can with limited resources. We renewed our agreement with South Lakeland District Council to control greys in its woodlands and cemeteries and held a public meeting to generate more support. In the autumn we diverted one of our contractors to support our local volunteer, which was successful. Ideally we will recruit more local volunteers and contractors to operate in the town. Kendal seems to have become a breeding ground for greys, which then disperse into woodlands around the town with a consequent negative impact on their red squirrel populations.

### Kentmere

Kentmere continues to thrive as a haven of red squirrels. While large swathes of woodland were felled in 2016 the reds appear to have adapted to the new landscape. Occasionally greys are still seen in the valley and efforts to remove them continue.

### Longsleddale

Our contractor devoted time to engage with all landowners and residents in the valley this year to seek their views for our work. This useful exercise revealed a good deal of support and we expect to increase our efforts to protect the resident reds.

### Sizergh

Our contractor continued to liaise closely with the National Trust ranger to keep on top of the greys that continue to invade the area from the south. Numbers were down this year, however, which may be partly due to increased control around Levens and further south in Arnside and Silverdale. We were grateful once again for the Trust's financial support and for the growing number of residents and businesses that work with us.

### Underbarrow and Crosthwaite

Numbers of greys were down this year, but so were red sightings, with only one reported near Crosthwaite. We attended Underbarrow Marrow Day for the first time, which helped build connections with the local community.



## Red Squirrels Northern England (RSNE)

We work closely with RSNE as the organisation that collects data from across northern England on red sightings and grey cull figures. This information not only guides our efforts but also influences government policy on priority areas for financial incentives such as its Countryside Stewardship scheme.



RSNE's fieldwork reduced this year as they faced funding challenges. Previously, the Forestry Commission grant-aided RSNE for grey control in north Grizedale and Langdale. When the grant was reduced in 2016/17 we agreed to meet the shortfall. At short notice, the Commission withdrew the grant entirely for 2017/18 and since then we have struggled to combat the influx of greys.

## South Cumbria Squirrel Management Forum

We provide the secretariat for this bi-annual forum, which is a valuable way of sharing information and experience. The meeting brings together private, public and charity sector landowners as well as representatives of neighbouring red squirrel groups, Cumbria Wildlife Trust, the Friends of the Lake District and the University of Cumbria.

## Northern Red Squirrels

Northern Red Squirrels is the umbrella association of volunteer and community red squirrel groups across the north of England.

Geoff Hetherington, our Chairman, was the elected Chair of Northern

Red Squirrels Cumbria in 2017 and represented NRS at a reception at Clarence House. There he was able to brief Prince Charles on our work and emphasise the importance of volunteers in protecting our red squirrels. Later in the year they met again at the Westmorland County Show.

## Fundraising

We were grateful to several grant-aiding bodies, sponsors and donors for their support including:

- Arnside and Silverdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Barnes Conservation Trust
- Bittern Countryside Community Interest Company
- Cumbria Community Foundation
- Eric and Marion Scott Trust
- Forestry Commission
- Hare and Hounds, Levens
- Heritage Lottery Fund
- Holgates Caravan Parks, Silverdale
- Logs Direct, Halton
- Lindeth Howe Country House Hotel, Windermere
- National Trust
- WCF Pets and Equestrian, Kendal

We also received donations and help in kind from many members, communities and supporters. They were too numerous to mention and many preferred not to be named. We thank them all.

## UK Squirrel Accord

The UK Squirrel Accord is a forum of 38 signatories who are committed to work collaboratively on red squirrel protection and grey squirrel control. Bob Cartwright, our Secretary, has been co-opted to the Accord's Executive Committee to provide a 'voice' for volunteers. Bob also sits on the Accord's Fundraising and Communications sub-group.

## Arnside and Silverdale

2017 was a year of continued intensive grey control to secure the return of red squirrels. It's been clear that our many caravan sites are a destination of choice for grey squirrels as well as visitors; as easy food sources, they are major breeding grounds.

We are greatly indebted to Holgates for their support and cooperation. The intervention of our trappers there should prove a game changer.

We have increased our trapping and shooting and experimented with drey prodding. Six volunteers spent a day removing 38 grey squirrel dreys. We intend to repeat the exercise on other sites around the Arnside peninsula.

We have learned many lessons since starting in 2015 and now trap more effectively, while maintaining our focus to the west of the railway line and along the estuary.

We now have all the main landowners on board including RSPB, National Trust and Natural England. To everyone's delight, a red squirrel was reported in the Deer Park at Dallam Tower in July and there have been further reports of reds at Priest Hutton and at Warton.

Grants from the AONB/Landscape Trust, Barnes Conservation Trust and Bittern Countryside Community Interest Company were much appreciated, helping us to publish a pamphlet about the project and create a fund to meet equipment, bait and contractor costs.



## Rusland

We made great progress in this the first full year of the Heritage Lottery funded Rusland's Reds project – a part of the Rusland Horizons Scheme.

We now have more than 70 on our mailing list and over 20 local landowners actively involved in trapping and shooting greys, gathering many through attending the Rusland Show.

We've had red squirrels showing on our wildlife cameras at Haverthwaite, and 13 other reported reds within the Rusland project area, which is most encouraging and undoubtedly helped to enthuse the local community.

Our relationship with other Horizons projects is strong and we are working with the Scheme's apprentices to involve them in the squirrel aspects of woodland management.

In collaboration with landowners we are working on a map that will measure the extent of woodland under active squirrel management. We are also preparing material with the Forestry Commission with a view to involving visitors in spotting and reporting red squirrels – and raising their awareness of the issues.



## Woodland Trust

We have licences to trap in most of the Woodland Trust's woods in our area, notably near Brigsteer, at Beech Hill and Spooner Vale in Windermere, at Lakeside and near Bouth as well as in Arnside. While these are smaller woodlands, they

offer important and additional 'pieces in the jigsaw' which, through active management, can prevent them becoming refuges for greys.

## British Association of Shooting and Conservation (BASC)

BASC is acknowledged as one of the leading charities involved in wildlife management conservation and has worked closely with the Heart of England Forest to minimise grey squirrel damage there. The establishment of Shooting Clubs comprising competent shooters is one initiative they have piloted, which we think could have merit. We have opened discussions with BASC to explore the scope for a similar arrangement in our area.

## Witherslack and Grange-over-Sands

Historically Witherslack has been a major area for red squirrels. Now, with only fragile populations remaining, we have intensified our attention to grey control.

We have made greater use of contractors as well as volunteers and the effect has been positive. Around Witherslack and Ulpha we have recorded breeding populations of reds. Much more effort is needed, however, to secure a stable population.

We worked closely with Grange-over-Sands Natural History Society to

share information and were successful in a joint bid to Grange Town Council for wildlife cameras. We renewed our licence with South Lakeland District Council to control greys in its woodlands in the town. Further west, we were encouraged that the impact of intensive grey control around Staveley-in-Cartmel resulted in the recovery of its red squirrel population.

At the end of the year we were concerned, however, that felling operations appeared to affect the reds, which had become less evident. We will monitor the situation and liaise with the Forestry Commission, woodland advisers and contractors to minimise the impact.

## Looking forward

Our first objective is to make space for our reds to survive and thrive. This means continued and concerted grey squirrel control. The Government's 25-year Environment Plan is committed to more woodland planting, which we welcome. Encouragingly, it also acknowledges that non-native species such as greys represent a threat to reds, and damage trees, so exposing them to new diseases. These, due to climate change and international trade, are increasingly common. We are committed to working with landowners and agencies to help combat these threats.

We're delighted the research commissioned by the UK Squirrel Accord into grey squirrel fertility control continues to gather pace. While the ability to apply the vaccine remains some way off, pending extensive testing, for the first time it feels like we shall have a way to secure a country-wide reduction in the impact of greys.

Our ability to offer help now and in the future, either through our skilled volunteers or contractors, depends on raising the money we need to pay for equipment and bait as well as expenses. We must re-double our efforts to raise funds from grants, donors, sponsors and landowners themselves.

We have proposed to Northern Red Squirrels Cumbria, the umbrella association of voluntary red squirrel groups in the county, that we work more closely to get our message out. We will again be attending lots of shows and events across our area.

Above all we need to assure local people and visitors alike that our red squirrels have a bright future.



## Westmorland Red Squirrels

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*Our thanks to Cumbria Wildlife Trust for printing this Annual Review and to Frank Burns for the use of his images.*

**Report your squirrel sightings** via our online reporting form: [www.westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk/sightings](http://www.westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk/sightings) by email: [sightings@westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk](mailto:sightings@westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk) or by telephone: 01539 821714

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