

## Scottish Squirrel Group

SNH, Battleby 13<sup>th</sup> March 2014

### Present:

Jenny Bryce – SNH (Chair)  
Ian Collier - FCS  
Lindsay Mackinlay - NTS  
Karen Ramoo - South Scotland Project Officer SSRS  
Heinz Traut - South West Project Officer (SSRS/SWT)  
Doug Gilbert - RSPB  
Mel Tonkin, SWT – SSRS Project Manager  
Sophie Eastwood – Fife Red Squirrel Project Officer  
Sian Williams - Ayrshire Red Squirrel Group  
Cecilia Rogers - Grampian Squirrel Group  
Mark Ferryman – Forest Research  
Megan Webster - SSRS Project Officer Argyll & Trossachs  
Julia Garritt – FCS – (pm only)

### Apologies :

Simon Poots – Perth & Kinross Squirrel Group  
Mike Libera – Crown Estates  
Anne Gray – Scottish Land & Estates  
Colin McInnes – Moredun Research Institute  
James silvey - RSPB  
Stephen Willis – SSRS NE Scotland  
Dr Peter Lurz  
Andy Wiseman  
Ken Neil – SSRS Tayside  
Jamie Farquhar – Confor

### 1. Welcome and Introductions

Everyone was welcomed to the meeting and apologies given for those unable to attend.

### 2. Red squirrels and forest operations research – Mark Ferryman

Mark has been working with Kenny Kortland FCS on research to improve our understanding of the impacts of forest operations on red squirrels. Summary as follows:

The aim of this pilot study was to investigate if it was feasible to study the potential effects of forest operations on red squirrel ranging behaviour. The study was based on data collected in January 2013 by GPS tracking units that were fitted to four individual squirrels that ranged in the general area where forest operations took place, as well as to the harvesting machine in operation (John Deere 1470D/754 harvester).

The GPS tracking units recorded locations with an average accuracy of 10.2m and an average time interval just short of 16 minutes. The units were less reliable (*i.e.*, fewer locations were recorded) when squirrels were active during day-time than when they were stationary during night-time. Due to the inaccuracy of the GPS units the number of locations recorded had a large effect on the distance that appeared to have been travelled and as such, calculations of day ranges should be interpreted with care. Nevertheless, assuming that GPS accuracy was unbiased (*i.e.*, bias was equal for days the harvesting machine was and was not in operation), comparisons of day ranges and home ranges between days that the harvesting machine was and was not in operation are still valid. Furthermore, data collected by the GPS tracking units were sufficiently accurate to identify approximate locations of individual dreys and to investigate the effects of forest operations on drey use.

Forest operations did not appear to have an effect on squirrel day range<sup>1</sup>. The reason for this may be that the harvesting machine was put into operation only after squirrels' short morning of peak activity period had ended. However as said above these results must be interpreted with care and it must also be noted that only horizontal distances (2D) were investigated, whereas vertical distances may also play an important part in squirrels' day ranges.

Forest operations did have an effect on squirrel home range, both directly and indirectly, depending on the distance of their home range and the area of forest operations. This pilot study suggests that squirrels both decrease their home range size as well as shift their home range, in response to forest operations. In addition, squirrels were found to change their drey use in response to forest operations, but only if their dreys were situated within the area where thinning activities took place.

The pilot project confirmed that it is possible to study this issue. A more rigorous study with a larger sample size is planned for 2014.

### 3. Research updates – Mark Ferryman

- **FCS-FR Glenrigh Red squirrels project:** A pilot study is currently in progress to determine winter day/home ranges of red squirrels using supplementary feeders at a wildlife viewing facility in Glenrigh Forest (near Fort William). The forest extent at Glenrigh has been designated for “Low Intensity Silvicultural Systems (LISS)” in the new forest design plan. Red squirrels are frequently seen in and around the viewing facility but no sightings have been reported in the wider forest area since 2005. Five squirrels were fitted with GPS/radio collars at the beginning of February 2014 to record their movement over 11-12 days (limit of battery capacity). Radio-tracking has also been carried out. Trapping squirrels to recover the collars is planned to start 17<sup>th</sup> March. There appears to be an enthusiasm in the local FCS staff for a bigger survey project next year using new GPS units that FR are purchasing. These units can last several months depending on configuration. Contact for this project: [henry.dobson@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:henry.dobson@forestry.gsi.gov.uk)
- **Future use of Warfarin to control Grey squirrels:** Warfarin is likely to be withdrawn as manufacturers, e.g. Killgerm are now being required to pay a fee under EU legislation, which will be prohibitive. Warfarin can currently be manufactured until April 2014 and used until April 2015. Manufacturers are now looking to reclassify Warfarin as a Biocide, i.e. which would mean that grey squirrels could be controlled for reasons other than purely ‘Tree Protection. If warfarin was ever to get approval in the future for the control of grey squirrels where red squirrels and/or pine martens occurred, it would have to be demonstrated that bait couldn't be accessed by these and other species including through the food chain, i.e. secondary poisoning. The group were asked if anyone knew of the potential secondary effects of warfarin on Pine martens. DG indicated there is work on raptors.
- **Christopher Nichols - PhD Study (started October 2012):** The aim of the project is to shed light on the causes of bark stripping damage by grey squirrels, with the working hypothesis that they damage trees to ameliorate a seasonal calcium deficiency. Trees are most vulnerable to bark stripping during the spring and summer, and it is plausible that juveniles and female adults may be prone to calcium deficiency at this time - juveniles because they have just passed through their main period of bone growth, and female adults because of post-partum rigours such as lactation. In addition, after a good mast year grey squirrels will have received an unsaturated fatty acid-enriched autumn feed, and may be prone to calcium deficit in subsequent months. To determine if grey squirrels undergo seasonal “calcium-lean” periods, the femurs of as many individuals as possible, at different time points over two years, are being scanned using a pQCT machine to assess bone density. Also blood samples are being assayed for markers of bone turnover to determine if any such calcium-deficit exists, and if this deficit coincides with the bark stripping season. The project is also currently in the process of determining if grey squirrels can absorb calcium oxalate – the form calcium takes in tree bark. Supervisors are Nigel Goode (Royal Veterinary College) and [robin.gill@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:robin.gill@forestry.gsi.gov.uk) (Forest Research). Chris has asked whether he can obtain grey squirrel cadavers from grey squirrel control being implemented over the next year. They would need to be frozen until collected and labelled with date and location of trapping. Please contact [christopher.nichols@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:christopher.nichols@forestry.gsi.gov.uk) if you think you might be able to help or for more information.

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<sup>1</sup> MCP - polygon of movement

- **Pine martens:** Emma Sheehy and Colin Lawton recently published a study in Ireland which aimed to quantify changes in squirrel (red & grey) distribution and to investigate whether pine martens played a role in the population dynamics of either species. Within the study area, grey squirrels appeared to have gone into decline, whereas red squirrel populations appeared to have recovered. The study reports the first evidence of a population crash in grey squirrels and suggests pine martens abundance might be a critical factor. FCS are planning further work in Scotland contact [Julia.Garritt@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Julia.Garritt@forestry.gsi.gov.uk). HT noted there is already an interest group in the Galloway Forest – contact Martin Webber (FCS) and Jonnie Birks (VWT).

#### Comments-

HT suggested it would be helpful to have an aspirational list of research projects that students can be directed towards.

HT asked if anyone is looking at the impact of forestry felling for disease on red squirrel habitats. It was noted that felling (or killing by round up) is required by statutory plan health notice. There is some work published on this see – Shuttleworth, Lurz, Geddes & Brown -Forest Ecology and Management 279 (2012) 167–175, but nobody was aware of felling being quantified and analysed from this perspective.

**New AP 1** MF to circulate UKRSG update research when it is updated.

#### **4. Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising**

Minutes of the previous meeting were approved and passed.

#### **Action Points from 10/10/13**

**AP1** SE to circulate the UKRSG minutes when available. **Carried forward.**

The last UK Red Squirrel Group meeting had been held in October 2013 and the minutes only recently circulated and hence had not yet been passed to the SSG. JB noted a few of the salient items.

- The UKRSG had agreed to produce a veterinary protocol for translocation projects, but this has still to be worked up.
- Pox vaccine –The Scottish Government had approached the other UK governments to contribute to this research. Still ongoing.
- DEFRA are discussing adding red squirrel to Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act to stop the unregulated release of captive bred red squirrels.

**AP2** JB to circulate the link to Commissioned Report on squirrelpox modelling once published. **Carried forward.** This will be Report number 627, but has still to be released.

**AP3** JB to initiate further consultation on an updated Scottish strategy for red squirrel conservation. **On agenda.**

**AP4** Ian Collier to send out written update on FCS Strongholds. **On agenda.**

**AP5** Ian Collier to advise how people can make representation to the SRDP targeting working groups. **Overtaken.** FCS have already submitted proposals for the next SRDP to RPID.

#### **5. Local Group and Project Updates**

##### **Sian Williams – ARSG**

- During 2013 the group managed to secure funding to employ a grey squirrel control officer. The main duties of the post are:-
  - Control of Grey Squirrel within the Carrick area
  - Log sightings of red and grey squirrels
  - Undertake blood testing of greys to monitor spread of pox virus

- Develop network of supporters and landowners / managers who would be willing to participate in the control of greys
- Develop network of volunteers
- Promote & Develop the trap loan scheme
- Promote issue of the need to control grey
- Officer (Joram Smit) was appointed in September 2013. Since his appointment he has managed to achieve a great deal
  - Purchased timber and other materials to construct 50 feeder boxes.
  - Purchased 150No. live capture traps and 12No. trap combs.
  - Set out feeding and trapping stations in the Girvan & Stincher Valley. Monitor and manage the trapping stations. Currently have 67 cages running and 82 trap sites.
- 2013/14
  - All blood samples to date have tested clear of the pox virus. This is an ongoing programme
  - To date have managed to recruit 31 volunteers.
  - Attended RSSS (Red Squirrels in South Scotland) steering group meeting in Moffat on 1<sup>st</sup> October.
  - Presented at the ARSG AGM - March
  - Presented at the Carrick Invasive Species Project seminar - March
  - Initial meetings with key local land owners, managers and shooting syndicates in the Girvan and Stinchar Valleys. All contacts with public and private landowners, shooting syndicates and local residents has, to-date been positive with general indications of support for the aims and activities of the project
  - Identified/secured office space at Girvan Town House.
  - Designed posters to promote/advertise local events and volunteering opportunities within the project area communities. Posters put up at various locations within the core area to encourage sighting reports and volunteering opportunities.
  - Articles in the Autumn and Winter edition of the Stincher Valley Magazine.
  - Direct approaches to local residents close to survey locations.
  - Joram works closely with SSRS to maximise the effect of both projects.

### **Ian Collier – Highland Red Squirrel Group**

- The HRSG and partners are keeping their eyes open for any grey incursion into the Highlands. There have been no confirmed or suspected sightings of greys since the last SSG meeting.
- The website is currently being re-designed and is to be hosted by a new company. They hope to have the site up and running within a month.
- An Inverness councillor has been appointed as red squirrel champion.
- IC noted that large scale felling on the national forest estate has been ongoing – this is largely of lodgepole pine in the far north where there are no red squirrels. IC referred everyone to the FCS biosecurity webpage wrt squirrel surveys.

### **Sophie Eastwood - Fife Red Squirrel Group**

- There has been a grant funded red squirrel project in Fife for over 5 years now but the current 3-year funded project will end in April 2014. There are no immediate plans to access further grant funding (due to an organisation restructure FCCT are no longer able to host the project). Sophie's plans to stay on the Scottish Squirrel Group to represent Fife RSG.
- Despite sustained presence of grey squirrels there are still many healthy populations of red squirrels across Fife (these are centred around the 11 key sites for red squirrels as listed in the Fife LBAP 2013-2018).
- There are no red squirrel strongholds in Fife and it is not included in the national Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels project and it has been ineligible for grey squirrel control through SRDP funding.
- There is still overwhelming support and interest amongst organisations and the local community and SE has started the process to form a voluntary constituted Fife Red Squirrel Group. SE has provided briefing to the MSP red squirrel species champion. The Project is holding a final stakeholder meeting on 19 March 2014

with local representatives from SNH, FCS, NTS, Fife Council, SWT, community groups etc to progress discussions and actions.

- One of the main achievements of the Project has been the installation of a red squirrel viewing hide at Morton Lochs NNR, Tentsmuir Forest. SE worked with Tom Cunningham (SNH Reserve Manager), Derek Robertson (SNH artist-in-residence), local volunteers and a University of Edinburgh Geoscience Outreach student. Tentsmuir is a perfect example of a site with ongoing positive red squirrel management to the extent where grey squirrels are no longer being seen in the forest. Red squirrels are regularly viewed from the hide and the interpretive panels will be produced shortly. SE hopes this will help raise the profile of Tentsmuir, and Fife, as a great place to see red squirrels.

### **Celia Rogers - GSG**

- Aberdeen Greenspace have committed to supporting grey squirrel control officers for a further 3 years.
- Trapping methods for public areas in the city are being investigated.
- The use of devices for alerting staff when traps have been triggered are being investigated for more remote areas.
- The timescale for eradication has yet to be established, but support is increasing as reds are seen in Aberdeen.
- The spring surveys are starting with the help of lots of volunteers.
- Grey squirrel capture numbers have been low. A new controller is being deployed to monitor feeder boxes after project trapping has taken place to indicate if any mopping up is required.

### **Mel Tonkin – SSRS national overview – see appended summary.**

### **Heinz Traut - SSRS South West Scotland and Borders**

#### **Trap Loan Scheme / Volunteer Groups**

- 326 members on database (SW and Borders).
- Link for new, online-based trapping records form emailed to trap-loan participants to encourage submission of catches.
- Plan to email out a quarterly reminder.
- As only about half of trap-loan volunteers are contactable via email, we hope to follow up the balance of volunteers by post this year.

#### **SRDP trapping - South Scotland**

- 99 confirmed estates actively trapping under the scheme.
- Letters and emails were sent and phone calls made to estates/farms during Nov/December to request/encourage submission of trapping records. Good progress was made in obtaining responses.
- 75 (77%) of the 97 relevant estates' 2013 records were received.
- 2012 66 (78%) out of 85 relevant estates were received.

#### **South Scotland Tetrad Surveys**

- The survey is in progress across 102 tetrads by 80 surveyors/volunteers.
- Areas requiring high-risk biosecurity measures were identified: all areas west of the M74, and around Newcastleton, Tinnisburn, Craik and Glentress. Tetrads/volunteers in affected areas have been equipped with the necessary instructions and disinfectant (Cleankill Sanitising Spray, which is also effective against *Phytophthora ramorum*).
- Volunteer retention rate has been ~95%, thanks potentially due to timely and informative follow up after the 2013 survey, as well as the certificate of appreciation sent to all volunteers.

#### **Community Involvement**

- A number of events and talks have been delivered across the region, as well as the SSRS Project Conference in Feb 2014.

- Good media coverage of the project (ITV Borders, BBC Scotland Radio and various newspapers), thanks to encouraging reports of red populations recovering, for example in the Lockerbie and Annan areas. One report was of a resident in Annan seeing a red for the first time in her garden since she has lived there (47 years).
- Facebook following has grown to over 1000 followers, further expanding community contact.

## Megan Webster – SSRS Argyll & Trossachs

- **Monitoring:** Successful Autumn Survey of 15 tetrads with camera monitoring. The Little Acorn cameras continue to perform well and provide useful information and confirmation of feeder box results. A report on cameras is currently being produced. The Spring 2014 Survey is underway with a total of 37 tetrads monitored (15 of those tetrads with cameras).
- **Outreach:** A monitoring workshop was held at Stirling University (2/2/2014) covering hair analysis, camera monitoring and squirrelpox virus monitoring. 60 people were in attendance with many keen to volunteer with the programme. A follow-up BASC led Grey Squirrel Control Workshop was held at Argaty Red Kite Centre (6/3/2014) in which 12 attendees were trained in trapping and despatch techniques.
- **SRDP:** Of 17 current participants in the region, 14 have returned 2013 control results.
- **Cowal Red Squirrel Group:** CRSG has created informational signage to be installed by FCS at various locations on the Cowal Peninsula. One sign is currently funded through a grant with additional funding being sought for additional signage and posters. An event was held on March 1st 2014, to raise funds for future signage.
- **SQPV monitoring:** We will continue to sample for SQPV throughout the set 10km squares, with additional sampling taking place in the Plean and Lochwinnoch areas with help from local Rangers.

## Karen Ramoo - SSRS South Scotland

**Squirrelpox Virus Update:** A total of **112** blood samples have been taken across Scotland between January and March 2014. Of these samples **34** tested positive for SQPV. The virus was found present amongst the grey squirrel population for the first time in South Lanarkshire (Dunsyre & Liberton), Elibank near Walkerburn (Borders) and Blyth Bridge. Further positive results were also detected at Selkirk; Bonchester Bridge, Denholm, Langholm, Bedrule and Cavers – Hawick.

In early February at the West Lees Estate, Denholm a squirrelpox outbreak in the red squirrel population was detected. To date only one red squirrel has been sent in for post mortem, at least one other carcass has been found and it is anticipated more red squirrels have died from the outbreak as sightings of red squirrels in the area have decreased. The good news is red squirrels sighted in recent weeks appear to be healthy. Control in the area has been stepped up with an SSRS GSCO and the area contains a good network of SRDP control.

Large scale SQPV testing of the 74 10km squares have commenced in the northern parts of south Scotland and the Central Lowlands and Fife (Map 1).

### **South Scotland Update**

- Annual Spring feeder box surveys have now commenced.
- 4 FT control officers remain in post and are controlling in Ayrshire, Dumfries, Upper limits of the Tweed Valley and the central Borders.
- South Scotland was approached to assist the Royal (Dick) Vet School Edinburgh and Dr Peter Lurz with their research into Prion disease in the grey squirrel. Dean Holgate has been providing grey squirrel carcasses to the school.
- A number of events have been attended including a Kill Germ Pest Control conference where the Project presented a 45 minute slot. It was interesting to hear how much additional control is taking place in areas right across Scotland including parts of the Central Belt; at one location in Glasgow at least 500 grey squirrels are removed annually.

- Planning for the next phase of the Project is ongoing and each of the identified Priority Areas for Red Squirrel Conservation (PARCs) are being looked at in more detail to plan GSCO/SRDP control efforts within them and identify volunteer opportunities.

Map 1: Seropositive grey squirrel distribution January 2013 to March 2014



### SSRS Conference

- 69 people attended from a range of organisations.
- The Day was opened by Jon Barns (SWT) and consisted of several presentations: SSRS (Mel Tonkin, Steve Willis & Karen Ramoo), RSNE (Nick Mason), SQPV Modelling (Andy White – Heriot-Watt) and SNH (Jenny Bryce). Simon Jones closed the day.
- There was a 20 minute discussion on the following question: *“To what extent is it possible to rely on SRDP recipients and volunteers in target areas to deliver sustainable joined-up grey squirrel control over the long-term, and what would it take to support this public effort?”* Discussions were quite wide-ranging.
- Two workshop sessions held: Camera Trapping and Biosecurity.
- Positive feedback received from the day and noted by many staff / organisations.

### Discussion:

- RSPB noted support for the shift towards protecting red squirrel populations as opposed to preventing disease spread.



- LM asked about the potential to re-route the Highland line to the South of Loch Lomond – it was noted this originally reflected the grey squirrel range, but few grey squirrels were now found in this zone. LLTNPA are keen to continue support for the project.
- It was noted FCS in Argyll & Trossachs do not permit the use of air pistol (other than by staff) on the national forests estate – requiring the use of cranial dispatch.

## 6. Stronghold forest update – Julia Garritt

- Scottish Govt programme, led by FCS and aligned closely to the work of other agencies and initiatives.
- Programme was designed to support the Scottish Red Squirrel Action Plan by identifying areas where red squirrel conservation would be a high priority, and by providing forest management advice for those areas.
- Strongholds are not designated sites and have no legal status but appropriate management will be encouraged through the forest planning process and, where appropriate, financial support.
- Strongholds should complement other red squirrel measures by being landscapes specifically managed to have a good food supply for reds but minimal food supply for greys.
- 2005-06: Discussions with SG and agencies to set up the programme; have it supported at management board level.
- 2007-09: GIS mapping to identify candidate strongholds, long list of candidate sites taken to public consultation, and locations and boundaries agreed for the 19 strongholds currently in the programme.
- 2010-11: Set up steering group to agree the management guidance; PL contracted to write it; guidance finalised and sent for publication.
- 2011-13: Worked on purpose and content of the advice notes and on protocol and work programme for FCS; agreed metadata for FCS map browser; explored potential for printed GIS maps to be in the notes; secured funding for a contractor to draft the advice notes; contract given and undertaken (GGS) incl. visits to all Conservancies, Districts and sites; GGS devised a methodology to assess a stronghold's carrying capacity from accessible data; private landowners identified and contacted, to invite their input to the process; pilot study with Perth Conservancy.
- 2014 so far: funding for GGS to refine the advice notes; work shop for FCS staff.
- Nineteen sites, from 2,000 to 12,500 ha. Sites chosen in 2007 by scoring GIS attributes of, e.g. favourable habitat, absence of large seeded broadleaved trees, distance from grey population.
- Land ownership patterns vary between strongholds. Difficult to get consistent baseline data, either within one site or across sites.
- Changed context – greys and SQPV continue to spread; also tree diseases mean less choice of tree species to plant so more difficult to maintain carrying capacity of a stronghold.
- Set out how stronghold principles can be met across that stronghold, no matter who the owner is or how large the land-holding.
- Standard layout, to give national strategic direction. Accompanied by a note explaining methods, terms etc. Conservancies add detail, as they see fit for local needs.
- Next steps - finalise the data and layout of the advice notes, including which GIS datasets to print out as advice note maps. Send for stakeholder comment.
- Conservancies to ensure opportunities are made for forest planning and (where needed) GS control in strongholds.
- Seek Minister's approval and SG 'branding'; send for printing; launch in late summer?

- Embed strongholds in the revised Scottish Squirrel Strategy, as one of the country's measures for red squirrels.
- Undertake supporting work (e.g. four FDP projects, develop training and awareness material).

## 7. Scottish Squirrel Strategy Review

A draft review paper and review questions had been circulated prior to the meeting.

Process – JB outlined the current Scottish Squirrel Strategy (2004) was produced by the group with consultation limited to the group members. The grey control strategy (2009) had been a public consultation, but had not elicited many responses in addition to those from within the group membership. A public consultation will take more time and resources and therefore JB's preference is to carry out the review within the membership of the group. All agreed that this was more likely to produce informed responses. It was agreed that SSG members would circulate the question to their local groups and if possible within their own organisations and respond. One suggestion was to make use of Survey Monkey or similar software to assist with collating responses.

### Questions -

It was suggested that question 1 should ask what the vision should be rather than the aim. After some discussion it was thought that the vision should be long-term with a ten year outlook for the strategy.

Two questions currently relate to targeting – (2 & 11). It was suggested these are reworded to gauge some idea of relative priorities.

It was asked if the costs of developing a squirrelpox vaccine could be added to inform responses.

JF had requested by correspondence that the review consider the place of grey control for timber protection and hence a question should be added on this.

It was recognised that the new SRDP will seek to refer to supporting the actions of the revised Strategy and it would be desirable to have something (2 page document with area map) in place by May. This is obviously a challenging timescale for carrying out a review, but it may be possible to get some responses to inform SRDP in particular within that timescale with the fuller strategy following in longer-time. It was also noted that consultations would be limited during the period around the independence referendum.

**New AP 2 JB** to revise the strategy review document and questions and to look into electronic means of circulation.

## 8. DONM

JB to canvas for suitable dates in September.

### Summary of outstanding action points

From 10/10/13

**AP1** JB to circulate the UKRSG minutes when available. **Carried forward.**

**AP2** JB to circulate the link to Commissioned Report on squirrelpox modelling once published. **Carried forward.** This will be Report number 627, but has still to be released.

From 13/3/14

**New AP 1 MF** to circulate UKRSG update research when it is updated.

**New AP 2 JB** to revise the strategy review document and questions and to look into electronic means of circulation.

## SSRS Summary for Scottish Squirrel Group, Mel Tonkin, Project Manager

### 1. Budget Status

2 year expenditure budget	£976,330
Income secured	£976,213
Deficit 2012/13 – 2013/14	£117

### 2. Current Staffing

North East: 1F/T PO + 2F/T GSCOs.

Tayside: 1F/T PO

Argyll & Trossachs: 0.7 PO

South Scotland: 2 PO + 4 F/T GSCOs

Data and Survey Officer (0.6) responsible for the collation and management of the SSRS Project's many streams of data, co-ordinating the project's surveys.

Project Manager: F/T

### 3. Project Surveys

The preparations for the 2014 Spring Survey report are underway in all project areas: materials purchased/prepared, volunteers contacted, process of visiting all the feeder-boxes to repair/replace and disinfect all boxes has finished and surveys started at the beginning of March.

### 4. SSRS North East Update

#### *Grey squirrel control*

Trapping is focussed on Aberdeen and areas of rural west Aberdeen City. Capture numbers have been generally low over the past year, apart from the areas not accessed previously. In Hazlehead Park 13 grey squirrels were trapped but 8 red squirrels were seen by the controller. We had another pine marten capture, this time neighbouring Bielside (a suburb of Aberdeen).

A Christmas mailshot went to every address on our traploan spreadsheet, which generated an increase in traploans.

All SRDP records from 2013 have been submitted. Number of greys caught remains low.

#### *Funding*

Aberdeen Greenspace has approved funding of c. £145K for the next 3 years. This will contribute to an additional city control officer, which should allow us to maximise control effort over the next few years, thereby leaving a much smaller requirement for control in the subsequent years.

Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route mitigation funding has still not been approved for the FCS Huntly and Aberdeen City Council applications, but promises to be useful for sustaining some of the grey squirrel control work for 10 years starting from when it finally comes on stream. Both FCS and Aberdeen City Council prefer to direct their funding to SSRS in order to maintain a co-ordinated effort.

### 5. SSRS Argyll & Trossachs

#### *Survey*

The Project Officer organised Autumn monitoring at half the Spring tetrads, as part of a trial of trail-cameras with a view to assessing the costs and benefits of using the cameras. The results were similar to the Spring results, but with at least one site (Arrochar) changing from both red and grey to red only.

A survey workshop for Forth Valley was held at Stirling University in the hope of recruiting students to help with hair-identification. 50 people attended, including a large number of non-students.

#### *Community Support*

The Project is assisting the Cowal Red Squirrel Group to develop and set up red squirrel interpretation signage for a small number of forest trails, funded by a FCS grant to the group.

#### *SRDP*

Full data for 2013 has been received for 8 estates; a further 9 have yet to submit to SSRS.

#### *Funding*

The Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority have indicated continuing support for the project in their area, and have indicated that they are likely to increase their financial contribution. 2014 is the Park's WildPark 2020 year, in which they will celebrate 5 priorities, one of which is red squirrel.

## **6. SSRS Tayside Update**

*SRDP*: 24 estates returned all their data for 2013, 4 estates returned only one session of data covering a month 30 estates have not yet returned any data.

#### *Grey squirrel control*

The Project Officer is working with the Perth & Kinross squirrel group to assist Perth & Kinross Council with the planning for grey squirrel control in their greenspaces. Surveys are being set up with the PO's support. The data will be collected for the P&K council and also will feed into our general survey data.

#### *Funding Applications*

Red Squirrel Survival Trust has put in an application to the Griffin Windfarm fund to help support SSRS work to set up a new community grouping based in Dunkeld to take on greater responsibility for protecting the red squirrels in their area, and helping to prevent dispersal of grey squirrels northwards up the Tay towards Pitlochry.

The Scottish Wildlife Trust also has two other applications for funding work in Tayside: one to support a GSCO for eastern Angus: this has been approved; a second to contribute to the remainder of the Tayside project – we should hear shortly. It also seems likely the FE in Tayside will continue to contribute so that we can engage two seasonal contractors to work the National Forest Estate lands that support grey squirrels.

## **7. SSRS Phase 3**

The SNH proposals for their conditions for funding a Phase 3 of SSRS were discussed at the last SSRS Steering Group meeting. The proposals / options for the 3 parts of the project were as follows:

1. **North East Scotland**: Status quo
2. **South Scotland**: opting for red squirrel protection at strongholds and significant red squirrel populations only.
3. **Central Lowlands**: the current network along the Argyll to Angus line, focussing on reinforcing the control and SQPV containment along the red/grey interface across the Central Lowlands (the Highland Line) in order to prevent the spread of both grey squirrels and Squirrelpox virus into the core red squirrel populations of the Highlands and Aberdeenshire.

The proposals need to be signed off by Scottish Government. Although it seems likely that Government will sign this off, we are unlikely to hear the decision until mid-March.