

Biotype

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European Squirrel Workshop

Amanda Lloyd

The 6th European Squirrel Workshop was held on 11th-13th September in Acqui Terme, two hours south of Turin, Italy. The workshop was attended by scientists from Spain, Portugal, the U.K., Belgium and Italy. The first day included papers on:

- Population genetics of the red squirrel in Valtellina and Valle d' Aosta, Italy.
- Red squirrels in Lombardy: a review of the Sciurus Group studies.
- Red squirrels in the Brussels region: can they reach isolated city parks?
- Habitat heterogeneity and fragmentation: how does the red squirrel react
- Occupation dynamics by the red squirrel of fragmented woods of the northern Apennine.
- Individual identification in the variable squirrel.
- Activity budget and foraging behaviour in the variable squirrel.
- Vocalisation in the variable squirrel.

The second day of the workshop was spent at the Royal Castle of Racconigi, Cuneo.

The morning session looked at behaviour patterns and population dynamics for European red squirrels, with papers on:

- The relation of behaviour patterns to population number in exploited red squirrel populations.
- Ecology of red squirrels in Alpine forests.
- Population dynamics of red squirrels in a Mediterranean woodland.
- Do red and grey squirrels co-exist in the conifer forests of Wales?

The afternoon was taken up with a trip to

Racconigi's royal park, which has a population of up to 400 grey squirrels ("scoiattolo grigio").

The theme for the third day was the conservation of red squirrels in areas already colonised by greys, with presentations on

- Mixed species stands: how good are they for red squirrels?
- A method of selecting woodland refuges for red squirrels.
- An attempt to evaluate the population dynamics of introduced alien squirrel species.
- The mechanism of replacement of red by grey squirrels: recent findings and new questions.
- The grey squirrel in Britain: past, present and future.
- The application of spatially explicit population models for red squirrel conservation and grey squirrel management.
- Squirrel control and management in the UK – lessons for Europe.
- Guidelines for the control of the grey squirrel in Italy.

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Future Perspectives for Woodland Deer in Scotland

Helen Armstrong

Brenda Mayle and Helen Armstrong presented talks at this 3-day conference funded by the EU (EAGGF and Northern Peripheries Funds) which took place in Coylumbridge on 18th – 20th September.

The first two talks covered the theoretical background to:

- Predicting deer population dynamics.
- Deer behaviour and impacts on woodlands.

Tor Danelsen from Norway then outlined a means by which they have been predicting elk population from their impacts on different tree species.

The next three talks presented the results of deer management case studies:

- Sika management in north Scotland.
- Native woodland restoration in Sunart.
- Roe deer management in Glen Duror.

Ronald Rose, a private deer management consultant, then outlined the training that is available to woodland deer managers.

Two field trips were arranged for the second day:

- One group visited the new EU funded Forest Enterprise (FE) deer larder at Inshriach, and the RSPB reserve at Abernethy. FE staff from Inshriach gave a talk about deer and woodland management at Glenmore forest. At Abernethy the group were able to see the positive effect of high deer culls on the regeneration of native pinewoods on the estate. The RSPB have also removed or marked all their deer fences which seems to have resulted in capercaillie numbers remaining constant, rather than falling as they have elsewhere in recent years.
- The other group visited Rothiemurchus and Alvie estate to discuss sport shooting, tourism and diversification.

The third day covered sport shooting and venison marketing, with talks on:

- The importance of providing accommodation and other 'spin-off' services to sports people and their families if estates are to make money



from commercial stalking.

- Rick Bestwick, a venison dealer with the contract to buy most of the venison produced by FE, pointed out that high standards of hygiene and production are legally required only for the venison export market. However, many of the potentially large buyers in this country will only buy from quality-assured sources.
- The importance of assuring high standards of production was re-iterated by Christian Nissen, the chief executive of Highland Game.

Both game dealers felt that there was potentially a lucrative market for UK venison at home which could replace the German market, lost as a result of the foot and mouth disease export ban. Before this could be built up, however, standards of venison production would have to be improved.

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Restoring Natura Forest habitats - 4th and 5th October, Fort William

Liz Poulson

Liz Poulson, Russell Anderson and Joe Hope attended a 2 day conference in Fort William which reported on a variety of forest restoration projects funded by EU LIFE bids, notably the wet woods LIFE project and the oakwoods LIFE project. The first day involved a variety of speakers, both British and Scandinavian addressing delegates on the themes of:

- The Natura programme and the LIFE funding system.
- The past and present management of Natura forests, favourable condition and current management need.

The final session dealt with the need for community involvement in Natura projects. Dr Michael Foxley, a Sunart resident and organiser of community involvement, gave a very useful talk about the practicalities of restoring forest habitats. His talk

emphasised the need for community consultation and involvement, and the employment opportunities available from these projects. The question and answer session that followed covered many issues, notably the measurement of restoration and the assessment of when restoration projects were complete.

The second day involved optional field trips either to the Sunart Oakwoods or to bog woodland restoration sites at Inshriach (Forest Enterprise) and Abernethy (RSPB). At Inshriach, David Jardine, Forest District Manager for Inverness district, explained some of the operations used to restore the bog woodland. These included:

- Removal of trees.
- Damming of minor drainage channels to raise the water levels.
- Brash burning.

The issue of brash prompted debate. At present Forest Enterprise is burning the brash. It was suggested that the brash be retained to provide habitat for birds, small mammals and invertebrates. However, it was argued that brash retention would lead to nutrient release into the rising waters, which could trigger widespread algal growth.

After lunch the delegates visited the RSPB reserve at Abernethy. Stewart Taylor, the reserve manager, led the delegates around a number of bog woodland sites at various stages of restoration. The final site, a cleared area previously covered with dense lodgepole pine again prompted prolonged debate. Delegates discussed the benefits of restoration and the site's status as a Special Area of Conservation. Some people viewed it as having excellent potential for restoration while others saw it as an ecologically poor site requiring huge investment in time and money to restore it to anything near pristine bog woodland.

Another interesting issue discussed was the impact of bog restoration beyond the boundaries of a site. Several major drains at the final site have been blocked to raise the water levels, but this has led to problems on some of the neighbouring farmland. Large amounts of water were still draining off the site via former plough lines. Last winter exceptionally heavy rains led to spectacular flooding on the restoration site, and the dumping of several tonnes of waterlogged peat onto neighbouring farmer's fields. To prevent this in the future, the plough lines will have to be filled in. This can lead to several practical problems. Machinery has already sunk in the bog, so work would probably have to be done by hand.

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Species Action Plans

Alice Broome

The Species Action Plans (SAP's) research programme was started over 2 years ago following a review of the Forestry Commission's potential contribution towards the SAPs Species research needs.

Apart from Forest Research's long established Red Squirrel project*, some new projects have been initiated. These include:

Mammals

- The effects of planted ancient woodland restoration on dormouse populations in conifers.**

Birds

- Capercaillie Initiative – as part of this Forest Research have been evaluating methods of marking fences to make them more visible to Capercaillie.
- Cone monitoring and Scottish crossbills – data collected by Forest Research on cone production in Sitka spruce, Norway spruce and Scots pine is being reviewed as part of Forest Research's contribution to Scottish crossbill research

Invertebrates

- Coppice Moths – it is now the second year of the contract, and Butterfly Conservation is continuing to monitor the day flying SAP moth species, Argent & Sable and Drab Looper, at a number of coppice sites recently restored under the Forestry Commission's "Coppice for Butterflies Challenge". In addition, studies into the larval ecology of the Argent & Sable and Waved Carpet moth have been carried out at a limited number of sites in the south of England.
- Lime Bark Beetle – a survey of lime woods in England and Wales is underway for the rare and harmless bark beetle *Ernopus tiliae*, (known as ET). The start of this Forestry Commission contract



(managed by Forest Research) has been delayed by the Foot & Mouth outbreak and is now expected to run into next year.

Plants

- Juniper -a regional survey of the status and condition of woodland juniper in Scotland, is nearing completion. The survey has focused on juniper growing on Forest Enterprise ground, gathering information on the extent, health and age structure of juniper as well as recording site conditions of where the juniper was found.

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