

The Fife Red Squirrel Group was established in 2006 by the Fife Countryside Ranger Service to address the need for a co-ordinated approach to red squirrel conservation in Fife. The first phase of the project centred around two pilot forests, Devilla and Ladybank.

Red Squirrel Project Officer Sophie Eastwood embarked on the next stage of the Fife Red Squirrel Project at the start of April 2011. The second phase of the project will continue to be delivered by the Fife Coast & Countryside Trust. It is a community-based project spanning three years and is now Fife-wide, with a focus on the nine key woodland sites for red squirrels (and their 3 km buffer zone) listed in the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (please see distribution map for key sites).

The aim is still to promote red squirrel conservation within the Kingdom of Fife by: raising the profile of red squirrels and red squirrel conservation; surveying and monitoring of red and grey squirrel populations; working with schools to teach young people about red squirrels; providing habitat management advice to landowners; planting trees to create new habitat and reduce woodland fragmentation; and advocating targeted and responsible control of grey squirrels.

Work Area Updates

Education and Awareness

- Developing a £50K red squirrel trail at Falkland Estate in partnership with the Centre for Stewardship, we are currently waiting for Ed Heather-Hayes (FCCT) to complete plans
- At present I don't actively seek talks, walks and events but do them when requested, e.g. Fife Show, SNH Discovery Day, Scone Palace Game Fair
- Keep in contact with Ken Neil (Tayside) and Simon Poots (Perth & Kinross) to sometimes have a joint approach at events
- Except biannual Red Squirrel Fun day, first one on October 22nd at Falkland Estate
- Biannual newsletter (Spring and Autumn news)

Surveying and Monitoring

- Sightings transects have been ongoing in Ladybank (Elspeth Christie – Ladybank Forest Users Group) and Tentsmuir (Stuart Macdonald – Elmwood College) since their involvement with the Scottish Squirrel Group in 2005/2006. They currently have 6 and 4 transects respectively. The Falkland surveyors fell by the wayside, however, one individual is still going.
- Tess Darwin (Falkland Centre for Stewardship) and myself ran a squirrel survey workshop in September 2011. From this we expect at least 5 more surveyors this year.
- The aim is to set up and monitor transect(s) in each of their key sites twice a year (April and October).

Habitat Management and General Advisory Role

- Tree Planting Day on November 22nd at Falkland Estate with ranger Bob Weston
- Another is planned for early 2012

Grey Squirrel Control

- Grey squirrel control programmes around Devilla and Ladybank were established in Phase I with a contractor, with varying success
- Maintained link with the contractor, the immediate focus is to re-engage the above landowners. The contractor 'handed over the ropes' to Devilla in September and plans to visit Ladybank in the next month or so.
- Grey squirrel equipment purchased, including: 200 cage traps, heavy-duty gloves, nitrile gloves, safety glasses, spray bottles, disinfectant
- Some remainder equipment from Phase I, Hessian sacks,
- Although the focus is on landowners we already have one dedicated volunteer trapper in West Dunfermline
- Established link with Kenny Willmitt from British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) who has agreed to run grey control workshops for volunteers
- One BASC workshop has been held so far, out of 8 attendee's it is likely that 2-3 will go on to trap.