



Christmas 2011 news

This brief covers project activity since the last PAG meeting on October 11th 2011. Shortly after our last meeting, the Project Management Group concluded the development of a new Memorandum of Understanding, releasing funding from Natural England and Forestry Commission, which in turn could then be used to release our Biffaward and Heritage Lottery Fund grants. RSNE is now alive and kicking!

1. Team recruitment (first phase)

Recruitment of new team members began in early November, with interviews now concluded and appointments made. Our first new team members are shown below:

Russell Tait **Conservation Officer** (managing the Ranger team)

Russell joins us after 16 years with Northumberland National Park, latterly managing their northern ranger team. Russell also plays the Northumbrian pipes, which he claims have squirrel charming properties.

Emma Wright **Red Squirrel Officer (Northumberland)**

Emma joins us from Somerset FWAG, recently developing and delivering a native woodland management partnership project.

Simon O'Hare **Red Squirrel Officer (Cumbria & Yorkshire Dales)**

Simon will retain his current role for us in Cumbria and the Yorkshire Dales.

Adam Seward **Research Officer**

Adam has just completed his PhD at Cardiff University (studying the impact of climate change on Wheatears) and has previously worked on bird and mammal research projects in Africa and Indochina.

Katy Cook **Engaging Communities Officer (Northumberland)**

Katy has been working in retail for last two years while volunteering with the National Trust and other organisations to build her experience following an ecology degree at Durham University. Katy lives in Haltwhistle and is karate black belt (to be tested as a method of grey control).

Christine Westerback **Community Support Officer**

Chris will continue her current duties, supporting the team and local groups, with a particular focus on our community engagement work in Northumberland.

Jamie Stewart **Red Squirrel Ranger (North Tyne Valley, Northumberland)**

Jamie is our first new Ranger, taking on a demanding trapping programme in the North Tyne valley and supervising contractors in Slaley Forest next summer.

New team members will begin their new posts during January and will be invited to attend the next PAG meeting in March. Huge thanks to PAG members Sally Hardy, Richard Pow, Mike Pratt, Craig Shuttleworth and Brendan Callaghan for their help in selecting and interviewing candidates. The recruitment of the Red Squirrel Ranger (grey control) team will begin in January. We look forward very much to involving many of you in this process.

2) On-going Grey Squirrel Control

Our current full-time Rangers, John Lisle (Northern Eden Valley, working in partnership with Penrith & District Red Squirrel Group) and Amy Campbell (Merseyside) have continued their work into the winter.

John is now free shooting after a successful summer and autumn trapping campaign on 16 target woodland estates in the Eden Valley. Our recently completed transect, hair tube and trail camera monitoring in 5 woodlands found only red squirrels in occupation. John continues to successfully involve dozens of volunteers in trap and feeder monitoring,

Amy has been working extremely hard alongside Tim Dale of Liverpool University to monitor pox virus spread following autumn pox cases in stronghold woodlands. No new cases have been detected so far this winter and Amy expects to move back on to the landscape grey trapping programme after Christmas. Lancashire Wildlife Trust has recently secured a grant from SITA Trust (with help from RSST) that will enable this intensive grey control to continue until late 2014. Great news!

3) 2012 Grey Squirrel Control capacity development

a) Forestry Commission grant funding

Good progress in being made with FC grant funded grey control projects as outlined below:

Stronghold location	Progress	Expected outcome for 2012
Greystoke Reserve and surrounding estates, eastern Lakes stronghold, Cumbria	All bar one WIG applications now submitted. Final one will follow in January once technical registration hurdles have been cleared.	New contractor employed by RSNE, working with Penrith group for 5 years from spring 2012.
Western Kielder stronghold, north and east of Longtown in Cumbria.	New WIG application submitted.	New contractor along this border zone for 5 years from spring 2012.
Grasmere/Rydal	All WIG applications submitted	At least one contractor working with local group support for 5 years from spring 2012.
North Tyne around Countess Park, Northumberland.	Woodland RPA registration application made. WIG application to follow in January.	Delivery to be part of North Tyne Ranger patch from spring 2012.
Main Tyne north bank	Several new WIG applications developing for early 2012 submission.	Uncertain yet.
Eastern Harwood stronghold	Management plans passed to National Trust for conversion in to WIG applications.	NT expect to employ a contractor covering two estates for 5 years from spring 2012.

Merseyside	One new agreement approved, other applications.	Secure match funding to strengthen current LWT control project.
Kyloe Stronghold	Berwick Group monitoring detected grey squirrels in the reserve this summer. Berwick Group and RSNE worked to persuade all relevant woodland owners to revise current WIGS to include more trapping effort.	New contractor control capacity from spring 2012.

Again, the progress outlined above has been greatly assisted by our Forestry Commission partners, private woodland owners and local group members. Where the control work identified in successful applications is delivered by RSNE control team staff, this FC grant funding will be a crucial part of the overall RSNE project match funding mix.

RSNE control team deployment will be previously discussed with PAG in October. Our Conservation Strategy can be found [here](#) on our website.

b) Local group projects

Local groups continue to develop new funding to grow their own grey control capacity. The two examples below indicate the scale of ambition and capability of the group network. Westmorland Red Squirrel Group has just been awarded a Your Heritage grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund for red squirrel conservation activities (including two years of grey squirrel control) in and around Grizedale Forest in south Cumbria. We will be working with the Group and project partners to deliver squirrel monitoring that informs further conservation planning.

In other departure, Penrith & District group has lodged an application for three years of grey control in the Upper Eden and Ullswater valleys with SITA Trust. The outcome of the bid will be clear by next spring. RSNE again will deliver squirrel monitoring as part of the project. Both projects will add to the overall scale of the RSNE grey control network and their inclusion in the RSNE monitoring network will provide strong performance monitoring measures. Congratulations to both groups for all their efforts in developing partnership projects on this scale.

RSNE funding has also been made available for volunteer-led control projects for 2012. Applications from local groups have been invited and awards totalling a maximum of £10,000 will be made in January.

4: Partnership working and sharing best practice.

We have all been working hard to establish the RSNE project, helping both groups and individuals understand the how and why of RSNE. In addition to the work detailed above, additional progress over the last three months includes:

- RSNE presentations and project discussions at the Cumbria and Northumberland NRS network meetings in November.
- Continued landowner/agent liaison in Cumbria, Northumberland, Merseyside and the Yorkshire Dales linked to WGS development and access for grey control/monitoring (including Northumberland County Council, Northumbrian Water, National Trust).
- Supporting NRS to establish a new Morpeth Red Squirrel Group
- An inclusive PR strategy development workshop (strategy to be shared at the next PAG meeting) hosted by Northumberland National Park.
- Supporting Allerdale Group to raise community awareness of squirrel pox.

- Project mentions on Countryfile and regional press/BCC website
- Signposting and updating the RSNE website
- Sessions with Forestry Commission estate staff to develop a shared work programme and communication plan for reserve woodlands across northern England.

We will be undertaking more PR work in January linked to control team recruitment and will continue to build our profile as in-house capacity to service the resulting interest grows. Much more to do here!