

## RED SQUIRRELS OF THE HIGHLANDS

End of Project  
report

*Feoragan Ruadh na Gaidhealtachd*

*June 2012*

### Summary

The purpose of this report is to summarise the progress of this project. The main **successes** of the project are thus:

- An excellent website which has produced over 1,000 red squirrel records
- A suite of 12 red squirrel hot spots
- A network of lead volunteers around the Highlands
- Talks and walks to over 50 different schools and clubs/groups
- A grey squirrel monitoring plan as part of the exit strategy
- Partnerships between agencies, charities, health groups, schools and other groups

This project started as a LEADER project, but this changed half way through which altered the outcomes and budget. Here is a list of the altered outcomes after LEADER funding withdrawal (see attached **milestone** sheet):

#### Milestone spreadsheet – see Yes/No column

- Volunteer carrying out 50 hours project time – this time was not recorded formally
- Grey response toolkit – produced 2012
- Panels for trails – feeders and screens at hot spots
- Webcam – not pursued due to reduction in funding, link to RSPB webcam
- Community meetings – informal meetings rather than a specific time recording
- Stronghold surveys – delayed by internal FCS process
- Training for health initiatives – no longer a requirement

### Project progress 2009 – 2012

#### YEAR 1 2009

LEADER confirmed **funding** for 3 years in March 2009. FCS, SNH and CNPA matched this funding. The total budget was just over £100,000 for a part-time project officer, the creation of a new interactive website, reasonable mileage for volunteers taking part in 'extreme squirelling' and the creation of a series of squirrel trails in Highland.

This project, *Feorgan Ruadh na Gaidhealtachd* ran **from** July 2009 until June 2012. Juliet Robinson as the project officer with Ian Collier of FCS, as the project manager.

## YEAR 2 2010

The **new website** was successfully launched on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2010. It has an ordnance survey map for recording and viewing records (which can be interrogated), an events guide, discussion forum, blog and guidance section. [www.redsquirrelsofthehighlands.co.uk](http://www.redsquirrelsofthehighlands.co.uk)

A **survey pack** was produced for volunteer surveyors in the Highlands. Agents and forestry staff can also use it. Level 1 is for presence/absence information and Level 2 is for more detailed surveys, based upon FCS Practice Note '*Practical techniques for surveying and monitoring squirrels*' 2009. Survey training days took place in January in Munloch. The purpose of the training days was to get more people recording and surveying, and where possible to identify lead volunteers.

All **records** are displayed on the new website and are being shared with FCS Districts in Highland and with the Scottish Squirrel Survey.

Taking **groups** (*see attached list of events*) on walks and giving talks continued as before. Increasing emphasis upon groups involved with the health agenda means more people are appreciating the value of healthy walks mixed with a focus on red squirrel conservation.

A **new leaflet** explaining the project and new website went to print. A total of 10,000 were printed and all were distributed successfully.

The establishment of a series of red squirrel sighting '**hot spots**' around the Highlands began this year. We used a fantastic 'trigger' **camera** to monitor feeder use. It was used at Glenrigh in Lochaber to establish feeder use and it moved north to see whether we can establish a red squirrel hot spot up there.

## YEAR 3 2011

We found out early this year that FCS could no longer receive Leader money. This was a decision confirmed by FCS Headquarters. As a result, FCS covered the project funding short-fall. Changes to the budget and outcomes are as follows:

- **Webcam** – use money for website.
- **Leaflets and panels** – reduced budget so hot spots need to be cheaper.
- **Volunteer expenses** – removed from budget (not being used to date anyway)

For F/Y 10/11 total spend has reduced from £33,708 to £25,546 – **reducing spend by £8,162.**

**A grey squirrel was found** on Skye Dec 2010 – this was put down by a vet and press release by SWT. No further incidences that year.

## YEAR 4 2012

A **dead grey squirrel** was found on the road at Duror, south of Fort William in January 2012. Local agencies and land managers were warned to monitor this area, and none have been seen since. A network of grey squirrel 'panic bags' around the Highlands are being developed. These will consist of guidance on how to deal with a grey squirrel record and equipment to monitor the site in question and how to use a trap if the record is verified.

A **live grey squirrel** was spotted near Evanton in March. Monitoring took place but it has disappeared, perhaps run over by a motor vehicle as it was seen near the A9.

We now have a full complement of **lead volunteers**. They are located around the Highlands and their main task will be to be the main local red squirrel contact within their region. We had a training day for them last October so that we could define their roles and keep in touch with each other.

### Lead volunteer names:

1. Heather Bantick Badenoch & Strathspey (north)
2. Wayne Fitter Badenoch & Strathspey (south)
3. Ron Bury Inverness-shire
4. Sue Tarr Ross-shire
5. Karen Reid Caithness & Sutherland
6. Chris Clifford Lochaber
7. Juliet Robinson Co-ordination and website

Brand **new leaflet** (second for the project) promoting the **new hot spots** was launched at the end of January 2012 with STV and local press. A total of 10,000 were printed with only 1,200 left for distribution to date. The aim of the hot spots is to have the following facilities at each site where possible: car parking, all ability trails to feeders and viewing screens with spy holes at a range of heights.

### This is a list of the **hot spots**:

Name	Place	Owner	Facilities
1. Torrachility	Ross-shire	FCS	2 feeders
2. Culbin	Moray	FCS	1 feeder
3. Craig Phadrig	Inverness-shire	FCS	3 feeders
4. Craig Dunain	Inverness-shire	Robertsons	3 feeders/screen
5. Farr	Inverness-shire	Community wood	1 feeder
6. Foyers	Inverness-shire	Post office/café	2 feeders
7. Boat of Garten	B&S	Private Estate	3 feeders
8. Inshriach	B&S	Nursery/café	Multiple feeders
9. Newtonmore	B&S	Highland Council	Multiple feeders
10. Laggan	B&S	Laggan Forest Trust	1 feeder
11. Glengarry	Lochaber	FCS	2 feeders
12. Glenrigh	Lochaber	FCS	4 feeders/screen

## Exit strategy

The Red Squirrels of the Highlands Project will come to an end on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2012. The following is proposed to continue the conservation of red squirrels in the Highlands

### Maintain high profile

After the end of the project, the Highland Red Squirrel Group (HRSG) will continue to manage the project web site (extended until March 2013) on a voluntary basis to maintain the high profile of reds squirrels in the Highlands. After this date the HRSG will revert back to a slimmer web site under HRSG name.

Also, the HRSG is to maintain 2 hotspots in Inverness on a voluntary basis. The others are to be continued by owners. Queries to the web site and by telephone will be dealt with by allocating planning issues to SNH, disease issues to SSRS and general local questions to Ian Collier on his direct dial number.

### Submit records

Up until March 2013 the project web site will continue to receive and process red and grey records for updated map info in the Highlands. This will be done on a volunteer basis by HRSG. After March 2013 all recorders will be directed to the Saving Scotland's Red Squirrel (SSRS) web site to submit any records. (These will then be uploaded onto NBN by SSRS):

### Grey monitoring

To date there have been 4 confirmed greys in Highland. A total of six grey squirrel panic bags will be distributed around the Highlands.

These will be held at **Forest District offices** for use by FCS staff and volunteers at:

- |                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| 1. Golspie       | North Highland Forest District         |
| 2. Torrachility  | North Highland Forest District         |
| 3. Smithton      | Inverness, Ross & Skye Forest District |
| 4. Glenmore      | Inverness, Ross & Skye Forest District |
| 5. Fort Augustus | Lochaber Forest District               |
| 6. Torlundy      | Lochaber Forest District               |

Each **panic bag** will contain the following:

- Instruction manual
- Contacts sheet
- Squirrel feeder with sticky blocks
- Mink trap with cage cover
- Stack of leaflets

Only one of the grey squirrel has so far been dispatched by trained personnel. There is a need for a strategy to be agreed after the project end. This will be **co-ordinated** by the HRSG with help from lead volunteers within the HRSG and links with Invasive Non-native Species Group, agencies and gamekeepers/ mink control project (tbc).

Juliet Robinson, 19<sup>th</sup> June 2012