

Northumberland Wildlife Trust

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Green Light given to Red Alert! Wildlife Trusts Welcome £1 million SOS Success

The refrain, "Can we save the Red Squirrel? Yes we can!" is echoing around the Wildlife Trusts of the North of England and their partners this week.

The Heritage Lottery Fund has just announced funding to help a major new initiative aimed at raising awareness about the plight of native red squirrels, which are extinct in most parts of mainland England, and to promote new conservation measures to save this threatened species which is so close to the nation's heart.

The "Save Our Squirrels" project has been awarded £626,000 by the Heritage Lottery Fund as part of a £1.1 Million initiative to be managed and co-ordinated by Northumberland Wildlife Trust on behalf of the Red Alert North England (RANEng) partnership.

With funding now in place, a team of 6 full time and 1 part time Red Squirrel Officers will be deployed from the Mersey to the Tyne and beyond to implement this project that will deliver the nationally important red squirrel conservation strategy launched last November.

Welcoming the announcement, on behalf of the RANEng Steering Group, Northumberland Wildlife Trust's Chief Executive, Mike Pratt commented:

"This is great news for all concerned with the conservation of this iconic animal from England's woodlands - the real 'Squirrel Nutkin'! We will work with our partner Wildlife Trusts in Lancashire, North Merseyside, Cumbria & Yorkshire, with landowners and the public to implement conservation measures in the 16 designated Red Squirrel Reserves and surrounding buffer zones.

Organisations including Red Alert North West and Red Alert North East have been working for years toward this end and this project will finally bring the North of England-wide co-ordination of resources and action needed. In particular, it will enable us to involve local communities and have a wider educational role, as well as carry out more in-depth species conservation work.

Thanks to this project many more people will get closer to this magical creature, possibly for the first time, through the Trusts' 'People and Wildlife programmes'. We also believe the project will fuel nature tourism opportunities in the North, helping rural communities to thrive."

The project has been recognised nationally as being one of the most important new initiatives promoting wildlife diversity and the grant is one of the largest ever made for species conservation.

The plight of the Red Squirrel is now recognised in local, regional, national and international conservation policies - it is featured in the Bern Convention, it is a priority species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and the Red Squirrel is afforded the highest level of protection under UK law, the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

Red Squirrels are as much a part of our cultural as of our natural heritage, featuring in song, poetry and folklore. Beatrix Potter's tales of Squirrel Nutkin have entertained generations of children and adults and have helped to cement the link between Red Squirrels and the English countryside in the public consciousness.

For the past two decades a range of organisations including conservation bodies, academic institutions, landowners, statutory agencies and the local community have worked to conserve the species. Despite a lack of resources, these organisations have achieved a great deal. However, this grant will help to promote a more co-ordinated approach and the dedicated SOS team will be able to respond more effectively. In particular the HLF funds will be used to address the public interest in and demand for access to Red Squirrels and their conservation. Development of access, engagement and income generating opportunities will ensure the project is sustainable and underpin the project's long term success for both the species and local communities alike.

The Forestry Commission are key members of the Red Alert partnership and are contributing directly to Red Squirrel conservation through management of the Red Squirrel reserves that they own. They will also be providing grants for Red Squirrel conservation in the reserves

and buffer zones. The Rural Development Service (part of Defra) is also providing important support.

Forestry Minister, Jim Knight MP, said today:

“Red Squirrels are a cherished but threatened part of our biodiversity in England. I’m very pleased to learn that this significant new funding has been secured by this partnership project. It is a key step in sustaining the remaining populations of Red Squirrels in the Red Squirrel reserves in northern England and it will enable more people to enjoy these beautiful animals.”

The project will be a real challenge as competition from the introduced American grey squirrel together with a disease known as squirrel pox that only affects Red Squirrels, have driven populations to extinction in the majority of England. Red Squirrels’ ultimate survival now depends on effective conservation measures in their last remaining strongholds so that future generations can enjoy them as an enduring part of our rich wildlife heritage.

Everyone can play a part and we will be announcing in the near future how the public will be able to help Save Our Squirrels.

ENDS ...

Interviewees Available

Mike Pratt, Chief Executive, Northumberland Wildlife Trust

Louise Bessant, Red Squirrel Conservation Officer, Northumberland Wildlife Trust

Richard Pow, Forestry Commission (Chair of RANEng)

Notes for Editors

1. Northumberland Wildlife Trust

The Wildlife Trusts is a partnership of 47 Wildlife Trusts across the UK, the Isle of Man and Alderney. Our vision is ‘an environment rich in wildlife for everyone’ and we are the largest UK organisation dedicated exclusively to conserving all our habitats and species, with a membership of more than 600,000 people including 100,000 junior members.

We campaign for the protection of wildlife and invest in the future by helping people of all ages to gain a greater appreciation and understanding of wildlife. Collectively, we manage more than 2,200 nature reserves spanning approximately 80,000 hectares. For further information about The Wildlife Trusts please visit www.wildlifetrusts.org.

2. Red Alert North England partners:

Northumberland Wildlife Trust
Cumbria Wildlife Trust
Lancashire, Manchester and Merseyside Wildlife Trust
Forestry Commission England
Forest Enterprise
Center Parcs
Forestry and Timber Association
English Nature
Lake District National Park Authority
Northumberland National Park Authority
Yorkshire Dale National Park Authority
Red Alert North West
Red Alert North East
Red Squirrel in the South Scotland
Rural Development Service
Mammals Trust UK
People's Trust for Endangered Species

3. Location of Red Squirrel Reserves and 5km Buffer Zones

Northumberland

Kyloe, near Holy Island
Kidland, near Alwinton
Uswayford, near Alwinton
Harwood, near Rothbury
Raylees, near Otterburn
Kielder, near Hexham
Dipton/Dukeshouse Wood, near Corbridge
Healey/Kellas, near Corbridge
Slaley/Dukesfield, near Hexham

Cumbria

Greystoke, near Penrith
Whinfell, near Penrith
Whinlatter, near Keswick
Thirlmere, near Keswick
Garsdale/Mallerstang, near Sedbergh

Yorkshire

Widdale, near Hawes

Merseyside

Sefton, near Southport

4. SOS Project Team and Target Outputs of Project over the next 3 Years

SOS Project Manager x 1 – responsible for managing the project (personnel, budgets, reporting, etc)

SOS Conservation Officers x 2 – responsible for delivering project conservation outputs (relationships with and technical advice to landowners and others on conservation matters, squirrel monitoring, etc)

SOS People & Wildlife Officers x 2.5 – responsible for delivering education and engagement outputs including access and interpretation, education activities, community involvement, publications, etc)

SOS Information & Support Officer x 1 – enquiries, admin etc.

- Construction of new Red Squirrel viewing facilities at Sefton, Winlatter, and Kielder
- Attendance at 45 town and country shows
- 9,000 projected enquiries from the public
- 27 Red Squirrel guided walks
- 1200 members of the “Friends of Red Squirrel Scheme”
- 540 school children and 9 teacher training days
- 60 volunteer training days
- 3375 volunteer days
- 630 volunteer activities (not just sightings)
- 9 champion schools and 45 educational sessions
- engagement with ethnic minority/disabled/youth/elderly groups

5. Places to See Red Squirrels in the North of England

- Chesters Walled Garden, Hexham (Northumberland National Park Authority – garden centre with squirrels)
- Wallington Hall, Cambo, Morpeth (National Trust – viewing hide for National Trust visitors in woods)
- Leaplith Viewing Hide, Kielder (Northumberland Wildlife Trust/Northumbrian Water – hide open to public)
- Ford Village/woodlands, Northumberland (Ford & Etal Estate – estate walks and talks by NWT)
- Longhirst Hall, Morpeth (Longhirst Hall – Red Squirrel holidays and natural conference facilities)
- Don Clegg, bed and breakfast with squirrels, Kielder (local B&B business with Red Squirrels)
- Haggerston Castle (holiday complex with Red Squirrels in grounds)
- Gosforth Park Nature Reserve (Natural History Society of Newcastle)
- Sefton Coast woodland, nr Formby, Merseyside
- United Utilities willow wildlife hide, Thirlmere red squirrel reserve, nr Keswick, Cumbria
- Winlatter Forest Park, nr Keswick

6. Other Local Businesses and Individuals involved with Red Squirrels

- Simon Fraser, Kielder (professional photographer & supplier of Red Squirrel postcards from Kielder)
- Greenhaugh First School, Kielder (teachers and pupils doing fundraising to protect squirrels)
- Land Factor (Land managers of forests in Slaley and Haltwistle areas)
- Longhorsley School (local school with children's warning signs for Red Squirrels)
- Tulleys of Rothbury (Delicatessen which also supplies Red Squirrel foods to public)
- Poltross Enterprise (squirrel food supplies and information on wildlife)
- James Joicey, Forestry and Timber Association
- Game Conservancy Trust (employment for Game Wardens)

7. Photography/Additional Information Available:

- Video footage of Red Squirrels in the wild at Hexham taken by Mr Don Clegg at his bed and breakfast in Kielder available on request, still photography of species (additional images available electronically on request)
- Electronic map of the 16 reserves and buffer zones
- Electronic maps of red and grey distribution – 1944 and 1998