

**MINUTES OF THE ENGLAND SQUIRREL FORUM MEETING HELD ON
THURSDAY 19TH APRIL 2007
CLEARWELL VILLAGE HALL, FOREST OF DEAN**

Present: Fred Currie, Chairman (FC(E))
Brenda Mayle, FR (BM)
Mark Wilkinson, Northumberland Wildlife Trust (MW)
Colin Booty, RSPCA (CB)
Charles Critchley, FE (CCr)
Charles Dutton, ESI (CD)
Huw Denman (HD)
Jill Nelson, PTES (JN)
John Morris, Chiltern Woodland Project (JM)
Judith Webb (JW)
Liz Halliwell, CCW (LH)
Lizzie Wilberforce (LW)
Rufus Sage (RS)
Caitriona Carlin NE, notes (CC)

Apologies: Craig Shuttleworth (CS) , Tony Mitchell-Jones (TMJ), Michelle Bromley

The Chairman welcomed those present and round table introductions were made.

Matters arising:

1. (JM) Kania Traps and BM responses
2. Buffer zones around Red Squirrel reserves: MW clarified that buffer zones incorporated river corridors and other routes of potential grey incursion.
3. Colin Booty asked BM re UFAW and NI Squirrels. BM explained that it was difficult to find sites where people were OK to have UFAW people present to take an overview of despatch. James Kirkwood report recommended despatch must be clear swift professional and d. BM stated that JK recommended monitoring the efficacy of despatch in order to feedback if there are problems. CB asked if there were plans to extend this. BM confirmed that Kania traps could be used in squirrel control. JMo mentioned that most use hoppers.

AP: BM to liase with JM, JK. Objective to seek sites where no-one is live trapping so that Kania traps could be deployed.

Research Update

1. Data and NBN

BM expressed concern over gaps in distribution data and called for data to be uploaded onto NBN. LH explained that CCW records are entered onto RECORDER database, and then can be put on NBN site. MW explained that they have access to GIS and then will put data for NE England on NBN.

AP All to upload data onto NBN (MW NE England, FC to contact CP re IOW data).

Pine Marten research

The group discussed the recent interest among estate owners in using Pine Marten to depress Grey Squirrels, and the difficulty in visual identification of scats. Forest Research can provide reliable scat analysis at cost price in Edinburgh. However scat analysis is unlikely to be reliable, and needs to set in context of food availability and location – e.g voles cannot be a major constituent of diet of Irish Pine Martens.

AP CCr to send BM details of Irish research on Pine Martens

AP LH to find out more at Waterford mtg in June and report back to group

SqPV

The group discussed the Wildlife Ark Trust campaign to raise funding for a vaccine against SqPV. Colin MacInnes at Moredun is at the forefront of research into developing a vaccine, and has had some discussion with Wildlife Ark Trust. JN asked if the group had views about the campaign but, overall, there was insufficient information available about the campaign to provide support. LH confirmed a letter had been sent on behalf of UKRSG acknowledging the work done by Moredun and highlighting the value of a vaccine.

Forest Practice Note 4 Despatch of grey squirrels and Warfarin useage

BM confirmed that the note on control of grey squirrels to benefit red squirrels had been updated to take account of changes in separate legislation on Warfarin and Animal Welfare. The practicalities remain the same, however ready made bait is more expensive and people are advised to go direct to suppliers.

AP BM expressed concern regarding insufficient information on Killgerm products and will follow this up.

The group also discussed the disposal of grey squirrel carcasses. There was confusion over what the Environment Agency state must be disposed of and what can left for carrion, following best practice.

AP BM, CB with others to raise this with EA again

Woodland Birds & Grey Control Project

RS described the Game Conservancy Trust, Loddington Trust and BTO research project looking at the hypothesis that best practice grey squirrel control will result in increased productivity of woodland birds. This will use control and experimental plots for statistical comparisons. RS summarised the protocol and answered many questions from the group. FC welcomed the project as the first stage in gathering evidence to test the hypothesis that grey squirrels have an adverse impact on woodland birds. BM recommended they take on board the recommendations John Gurnell made in their report for PTES/JNCC.

AP RS to send BM paper

UKRSG

CC summarised outcomes from the latest meeting which had been due to focus on SPV research. Due to bad weather, turnout was poor, and SPV research part was postponed. SNH will replace JNCC as the UKRSG Secretariat, so website will be hosted by SNH. Due to this transition, no decision regarding pages for each country was made. Items discussed were Research Update, Advice on supplementary feeding where there is a risk of SPV, Scottish conference organised by Mel Tonkin, Humane despatch and SPV.

AP re proposal to host country page on UKRSG website carried over till next UKRSG meeting (CC/TMJ)

ESI and European Issues

CD summarised the current ESI situation in Ireland, Brussels, France and Italy. Support for IMC is widespread. Prof Peters work was summarised and BM outlined the IMC work undertaken by CSL, reinforcing the fact for the species looked at, while IMC won't reduce the population size, it will slow down the rate of increase.

In Italy, there is increasing pressure on national government following a vote by regional government on grey squirrel control, but there is a time lag and BM pointed out that funding action at the local level is not well linked to regional and national government.

Time is running out to

resolve the issue while it is relatively small scale. A workshop on impacts of non native species on biodiversity was held in French- Italian border in March.

SOS North England Update

MW outlined that SOS is now up and running after a long start up. Volunteers have been trained to monitor buffer zones and undertake surveys. Local groups are being set up, following awareness raising talks, articles etc. Additional funding used to buy traps etc. as HLF money could only be used to provide training.

Sefton – No further cases recently

Kielder and **Winlatter** were also discussed. BM reminded the group that CMRC is the best way to surveys.

IOW & Poole Harbour Update

FC summarised IoW as still secure against Grey Squirrels. Colin Pope has refreshed the Action Plan, which now has higher community involvement. Contingency plan has been revised and refined.

Poole harbour has a big Sika problem. UEA has a student researching Red squirrels on Brownsea.

AP CD to meet CP at Poole.

AP CD to send BM research lists

Welsh Squirrel Group Update

LH summarised the actions to date to develop RS project for Wales. Richard Pow FC spoke about the work necessary to get the HLF bid in.

Wales Red Squirrel conservation plan revised and will be circulated to Wales Squirrel Partnership. Wales Grey Squirrel policy has not been updated, but propose to have meetings of a wider forum.

LH described Tyr Gofal schemes targeting work for BAP priority species may need tailoring in buffer areas for Red Squirrels. Hedgerow planting would not be encouraged in areas that would allow grey squirrels to spread further.

Better Woodlands for Wales (similar to WGS in England) has a funding scheme, but it is not clear how much funding is available. HD expressed concern that the funding level offered would not be incentive enough to ensure everyone was acting in a systematic manner.

AP LH to follow up issues around funding available from Better Woodlands for Wales. LH agreed to circulate AP from last WSG

Mid Wales Red Squirrel Project

HD and LW summarised the work undertaken since 1999, showing the contraction of Red Squirrels and expansion of Grey Squirrels, citing the example of Grey Squirrels throughout Teifi valley. They outlined how this contributed to FC Wales Forest Design and were waiting to hear how FC have taken this on board.

Clocaenog

Forest managed as a Red Squirrel habitat and undertake Grey Squirrel control. Windfarm proposals under TAN8 have been allocated a strategic search area. FC won't accept clear felling so developers have had to take that into account. Smaller proposals likely to be located at the perimeter.

Anglesey Project Update

Postponed as Craig Shuttleworth was unable to attend the mtg. LH summarised that potential issue with gene pool after two litters born with deformities.

AOB

JW highlighted the need to develop stronger relationships with NT as their work on historic and amenity landscapes may increase grey squirrel incursions. FC will be retiring within the next six months. The group thanked him for all his enthusiasm and dedication to squirrel conservation and wished him well in his retirement.