

Final.

**Note of a joint meeting of the UK Red Squirrel Group and English Squirrel Forum held on Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2004, Shanklin, Isle of Wight.**

Chair: Fred Currie, FC England

**Members Present:**

Valerie Keeble, Peoples Trust for Endangered Species  
Brenda Mayle, Forest Research  
Jason Reynolds, The Wildlife Trusts  
Colin Pope, Isle of Wight Council  
Judith Webb, Country Land and Business Association/Forestry and Timber Association  
Louise Bessant, Red Alert North East  
Zoe Smolka, Red Squirrels in South Scotland  
Jean Matthews, Countryside Council for Wales  
Bill Burlton, Forest Enterprise, Kielder  
Charles Critchley, Forest Enterprise, England  
Richard Schaible, Forest Service, DARNI  
Charles Dutton, European Squirrel Initiative

**Guests Present:**

Hugh Milner, FC South East England  
Richard Pow, FC North East England  
Claire Bowen, Peoples Trust for Endangered Species  
Helen Butler, Wight Squirrel Project

**Apologies:**

Tony Mitchell Jones, Chair UK Group  
Melanie Hardie, Secretariat, JNCC  
John Milburne, EHS NI  
Mairi Cole, SNH  
Gordon Patterson, FC Scotland  
John Gurnell

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and informed all that Roger Cook would be replacing Louise Huxley as ESI member on the ESF. Unfortunately Roger was unable to join us and welcomed Charles Dutton on his behalf. He asked Charles to thank Louise for her input, particularly on the grey squirrel policy drafts. He thanked Colin Pope for all the hard work that had gone into arranging the previous days event and site visits. Despite the last minute disruption caused by Her Majesty the Queens visit to the island on the same day he thought the tour and discussions had been very useful and enjoyable . He asked Colin to relay the Groups thanks back to all concerned.

Group members visited Parsonage Farm, a JIGSAW woodland linkage scheme to discuss the successful uptake of the grant on the island and the potential for reversing woodland fragmentation and provision of corridor and additional habitat for red squirrels, Parkhurst Forest , FE, to see and discuss forest planning for reds and

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provision of red viewing facilities, and lastly Briddlesford Wood, PTES (See Annex A), to see how high quality areas of semi-natural woodland (ASNW) can support good numbers of reds in the absence of greys. There are no special management needs for red squirrels on the Isle of Wight in the absence of greys. With virtually all woodlands on the island being occupied by reds no special management for reds seems necessary.

The Chairman and Colin Pope later met Terry Butcher, the Sustainable Development and Planning portfolio holder for the Isle of Wight Council who confirmed the high priority reds have within the Council and the huge boost to the landowning and local economy resulting from red squirrel conservation. An IOW Council press note on our visit stimulated local radio and TV interviews about our visit. The Chairman commented that it is evident that on the Isle of Wight, the Council, voluntary groups, FE, EN, The Wildlife Trust and the community at large are all working well and effectively together, and with the grey squirrel contingency measures now agreed and in place, there is every prospect that red squirrels on the IOW will continue to thrive in the long term .

### **1. Minutes of last meetings of UKRSG/ESF**

(The last UK Red Squirrel Group meeting had been held on 10.4.03 in Scotland and the last English Squirrel Forum meeting had been held on 6.11.03).

The minutes of both were agreed.

### **2. Matters arising (not covered by agenda)**

The recent grey squirrel scare on the island was discussed for which a court case is pending. An item on a local radio programme, which later proved to be a hoax, claimed that greys were imminently going to be released on the island. A trapping and monitoring action plan was rapidly drawn up by IOW Council, FE, FR, EN and The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust with emergency funding, largely from FC and FE, secured to enable trained and equipped FE Wildlife Rangers from the mainland to work on the island for two weeks. No greys were found.

The target area was carefully mapped and there has been subsequent follow-up monitoring with hair tubes. The traps used were multi-capture traps from the mainland. This was not ideal as it may have brought disease to the island. However, funding has now been obtained to make a set of 50 traps only for use on the island. Some reds were caught, but as the traps were checked three times a day, none died. Had there been any greys present, it was felt that they would have been caught. The traps were modified mink traps; each had a bait tray to ensure a constant supply of bait. This was necessary as on the island there are many small mammals to take the bait.

The scare raised the profile of the danger of greys arriving on the island and the police are now fully aware of the issue and on side to act if and when necessary. It was also a useful trial run for the future and helped focus efforts in agreeing a grey squirrel incursion contingency plan .There was some discussion on the specification and supply details of the specially made traps for the island.

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**Action 1: Brenda Mayle to provide details of single-capture trap design and costs and copy to all interested groups. Completed 25. 5.04 (See Annex B)**

There was discussion about possible future problems on the island. It was agreed that it is very difficult to put defences in place against rogue threats. The best defence is public awareness and constant vigilance.

There was some discussion as to whether this design of trap should be used in the north. Currently, they use similar traps but without bait trays.

In Northern Ireland, a similar trapping programme resulted in 3 reds being caught and one pine marten, but no greys. Traps were checked on a 24 hour basis and one red squirrel died of dehydration, therefore future trapping methodologies should ensure that traps are checked more regularly.

**3. Discussions following field trip to Jigsaw sites**

Future applications to Jigsaw were discussed. BM noted Hugh's comment that some people may be put off applying as they are waiting to know more about the imminent Common Agricultural Policy reforms.

HM spoke about future changes to FC schemes. In England WGS will be known as EWGS and the emphasis will be on regional targets and management, rather than woodland creation. This might work in favour of the red squirrel.

There are currently 38 Jigsaw schemes on the island with one final annual competition to come before closure in late 2004. Over 200ha of new woodland linkages are likely to change landscape character in a number of localities. It will be necessary to monitor the wildlife using these areas to show that new corridors really do work. Plans by FR to co-ordinate a landscape ecology monitoring project on the island are in preparation. This should be started soon to ensure that base-line data is collected. HM also informed the meeting that there is a good up-take of WGS and CS on the island.

There was some discussion as to whether Jigsaw should be adopted elsewhere in the UK, such as Anglesey. JM reported that a lot of planting is already going on there. However, in some areas this scheme would not be appropriate, such as in Northumberland where the planting of broadleaved trees would cause great problems close to red squirrel forest reserves.

The view was expressed that there ought to be channelling of funds elsewhere in future. HM noted that the reds in Briddlesford Woods are at just as high densities as in Parkhurst, 1 per hectare. In the absence of greys, reds can thrive in all woodland types.

Supplementary Feeding. This issue was discussed at length. Should reds be fed at hides to ensure the public see them? There was a divergence of views on this issue. At Parkhurst a decision had been made not to feed them but to encourage people to walk through the woodland to a hide in the expectation that some people would see them en route. The hide was simply a focus for a walk. Some group members felt that many people would leave disappointed and the aim of engaging them would not be achieved.

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Potential problems of feeding were raised; disease transmission, and encouraging greys into an area.

It was agreed that clearer guidance on this issue was needed.

**Action 2: Melanie Hardie to revise supplementary feeding advice urgently, including the advice that supplementary feeding should not be necessary in reds only areas and to make it clear that if used, it should only be for the purposes of engaging the general public and not for conservation. Advice should be included on what to do if greys are known to be advancing.**

## **UKRSG Items**

### **4. UK Red Squirrel Action Plan update**

The 2004 draft had been compiled by Melanie Hardie, JNCC.

Matters now acted on include:

All priority woodlands in Scotland have now been identified.

Jean Matthews plans to review the red squirrel strategy and revive a group for Wales, some progress has been made in central Wales, where priority woods will be identified using previous hair tube surveys and a trapping project to quantify populations with funding from CCW's species challenge fund and match-funding from the Local Authorities.

Sarah Cartmel is working in Clocaenog. The final report on this study is awaited. The study has used cone transects, hair tube monitoring, trapping and radio-tracking. Grey squirrels appear to be transient – entering the forest when cone crops are good. Recommendations for management of the forest are likely to include targeting grey squirrel control to periods when the cone crops are good, limiting fragmentation of the forest and maintaining core areas of good red squirrel habitat.

A captive breeding programme is ongoing in Anglesey but there are several issues that need to be resolved as the emphasis is on the re-introduction not the grey squirrel eradication/control programme. No monitoring of grey squirrel presence is being undertaken. Recent issues that had been highlighted in the media about Anglesey projects were discussed. CCW and FC have agreed a vision for Newborough Forest (SSSI, SAC and NNR) to remove trees from the coastal fringe of the site and to retain a core area of woodland which will be managed as continuous cover (see Design Plan Vision and map, Annex C). The plan is currently the subject of an EIA. Unfortunately recent press coverage of the proposals has been inaccurate. The same issue is active on the Lancashire Coast at Ainsdale and Formby.

Northern Ireland needs help to raise its profile, currently reviewing SAP. NI has not met aims of current SAP and needs to review the actions. Additionally greys have arrived at all top 5 sites in NI.

### **5. Website and Advice Notes Group. (Jean Matthews)**

Draft advice notes on the release of red squirrels and squirrel poxvirus have been circulated to the UKRSG, please forward any comments or sign off to MH by 18<sup>th</sup> June 2004.

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MH has purchased both [www.ukredsquirrels.org](http://www.ukredsquirrels.org) and [www.ukredsquirrels.com](http://www.ukredsquirrels.com)  
Groups members have received copies of suggested text and are requested to comment by June 18<sup>th</sup>, as above.

Each country group is to write a page about their own forums.

The Welsh Forum has lapsed and needs to be revived.

Jason Reynolds and Corrie Bruemmer are working on best practice for tree felling.

It appears that some mechanisms to protect red squirrels are not being activated at present, such as the EIA Regulations. FC issues only provisional felling licences. If agreed restocking is carried out then FC can enforce compliance.

**Action 3: All requested to send comments on website draft and provide a country summary to MH by 18<sup>th</sup> June.**

## **6. Standard National monitoring scheme proposal**

Jessa Battersby not present. In her place, VK explained that JNCC and PTES jointly hope to let a contract within the next few months aimed at reviewing all current monitoring methods for squirrels, assessing how effective they are, possibly suggesting alternative methods and preparing a national monitoring plan to be as cohesive as possible. JR said Peter Lurz had suggested only capture mark recapture could provide information on population size.

## **7. Red/grey squirrel research needs**

Brenda Mayle and Liz Halliwell had jointly prepared a list of research needs flagged up by attendees at the International Tree Squirrel Colloquium as outlined on additional sheet.

The most important is the need to conduct research into parapoxvirus. DEFRA and JNCC reluctant to commit open-ended funding for this.

Newcastle have EU funding for disease monitoring.

**Action 4: Brenda Mayle will study the paper by Mc Innes and Nettleton presented by John Gurnell's to the UKRSG and break it down into its component parts. Costing each part separately will allow targeting of funding. BM & FC to get together with the main agencies and groups who are likely to provide support and funding for the work and try to move it forward. BM to advise Charles Dutton of costs indicated in the paper.**

## **8. Use of airguns for grey control/ dispatch in priority red sites.**

Jason Reynolds gave a short presentation outlining the potential benefits that may be gained by shooting instead of a blow to the head. DEFRA guidelines give the latter as the first method to be considered, but give shooting as an alternative. Some welfare bodies, particularly the RSPCA, have strong reservations about the use of air weapons, as they can be misused. There is also difficulty over disinfecting traps following use. Discussion remains ongoing. Air guns are used in Northern Ireland to dispatch greys.

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**Action 5: Jason Reynolds, Charles Critchley , Colin Booty and Richard Shaible to draft guidance seeking advice from European Wildlife Division (Defra) They will also liaise with BASC whose deer committee is currently looking at new firearms legislation and approach CSL who have been working in this area.**

#### **9. SNH squirrel co-ordinator – new post**

SNH has agreed to fund the above post in full. Recruitment is underway and it is hoped that the post holder will begin in late June.

**Action 6: Scottish Squirrel Forum will send details of new post holder to all group members when appointment has been made.**

#### **ESF Items**

#### **10. Northern England priority red squirrel forest reserves**

JR gave a presentation on his work, summarised briefly below.

##### *Site Selection Considerations*

- a) Presence of reds and proximity of greys
- b) Size and type of forest
- c) Surrounding landscape
- d) Attitude of landowners

All 20 sites are larger than 200 ha. Each has a specific management plan and comprises a core area and a surrounding buffer zone. 1 site has only 1 or 2 red squirrels, but this number is expected to increase in time. Many others have several hundred, while Kielder forest , the largest forest, has 6000 -10500, by far the most as would be expected.

The size of the sites vary from 300 ha to 42,000 ha. as do their composition, the upland sites being dominated with sitka spruce. Kylee has trees of all age classes which provides continuous food for red squirrels.

Buffer zones extend 5km out from the edge of the core area and the average size is 13-20,000 ha, Kielder 100,000 ha. Land use strategies have been prepared for the areas within the buffer zones.

##### *Building the wider delivery partnership*

Richard Pow is preparing a bid to HLF and needs the support of the UKRSG. He is setting up a wider forum of all stakeholders across northern England. He has also set up an owners' group. RS Strategy and Funding bids are kept separate.

In 5 years time, some of the 20 sites will fall off the list when they are reassessed.

#### **11. Poole Harbour Islands Action plan**

12. The Chairman had organised a meeting with local managers and owners and they agreed to draw up a co-ordinated plan and grey incursion contingency plan using the IOW Plan as a model.

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12.Red Squirrel Priority Areas in England.  
Dealt with in Agenda Item 10.

**13, FC England Grey Squirrel Policy Development**

Draft 7 takes on board comments from Draft 6 version agreed by the ESF. This will essentially form the evidence for a policy position. A policy , consultation and the Ministers involvement is currently being discussed with Defra .The meeting urged a full consultation.The Chairman will keep members informed of progress.

**14. ESI update.**

Charles Dutton gave a background to ESI and current activity and confirmed that Roger Cooke, secretary of ESI ,will be attending the ESF from now on

**15. Remote sensing equipment** - This will be discussed at the next meeting.

**16. Dates of next meetings** – To be arranged but likely in Nov and Dec. Members of respective groups asked to indicate dates when not available. It was agreed that all members of the UKRSG need to meet and therefore the next meeting should take place in London for convenience of all parties, with the following meeting in Northern Ireland in April/May 2005.

**UKRSG: w/c 6<sup>th</sup> December 2004. Please let MH know your availability for this week.**

**ESF: November**

Valerie Keeble (with amendments by Fred Currie)  
May 2004