

# Northern Ireland Squirrel Forum Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> November 2004 at Forest Service Office, Belvoir Park, Belfast

## Present:

John Milburne (EHS) Chair	Robbie McDonald (Quercus)
Declan Looney (EHS)	David Tosh (Quercus)
Micheal McGoldrick (TC Dublin)	Maurice Turley (Colin Glen Forest Park)
Laura Finnegan (TC Dublin)	Christine Butler (Countryside Mgt Branch)
Geoff Hamilton (TC Dublin)	David Galloway ( Forest Service.)
Dermot Hughes (UlsterWildlifeTrust)	Doreen Swann (Belfast Zoo)
Mike Dobson (National Trust)	John Fisher (Belfast Zoo)
Brian Poots (Woodland Trust)	Michael Griffith (Forest Service)
Richard Schaible (Forest Service)	Colm McDaid (Lagan Valley Reg. Park)
	Colin Somerville (EHS) Minute Taker

## Apologies

Apologies were received from John Rochford, Ian Montgomery and James King.

## Minutes of previous meeting

John Milburne circulated the revised minutes and pointed out that there were two additions to the original minutes:-

1. Point 2 in the Minutes of Previous Meeting from Forest Service.
- 2 Updates from Members – John Griffin

Agreed

## Matters Arising

None

## Updates from Members

**David Galloway** (Forest Service Belvoir) - David reported that they had noticed a lot of greys and a serious decline in reds. They had carried out a limited amount of control back in October 2003 and Mar 2004.

Forest Service at Belvoir is continuing with supplementary feeding of reds.

**Colm McDaid** (Lagan Valley Reg. Park) – Colm reported that the park have 3 supplementary feeders. They have applied for Heritage Lottery Funding of £40K over 5 years, and hope to get an outcome in December or January. The intention is to employ an additional member of staff who will help in the control of greys. There is also a plan to have rope bridges installed across the Upper Malone Road where road kills occur. Colm stated that Malone Golf Club carry out pest control twice per year, but cannot provide numbers of greys killed in the past.. Numbers will be provided in future. Next summer, he has a plan to carry out a public attitude survey to the control of greys.

**Mike Dobson** (National Trust) – reported that in Mount Stewart Estate, reds were being fed and an education programme was being run. He reported that there are no greys in Crom and Rowallane, and that there were no greys, but approximately 20 reds in Florence Court.

He stated that feeders were also attracting greys and this was putting the reds at risk, He said that feeders were possibly becoming a disadvantage and were affecting the progress that had been made.

Control measures are still being actively carried out.

Mike was asked to find out the number of greys killed.

**ACTION Mike to provide numbers of greys killed**

**Richard Schaible** (Forest Service) referred to the UKRSG advice note which stated that it was good to feed reds, but this should stop if greys were being attracted.

The UKRSG are setting up a website (in association with the JNCC website) with advice on supplementary feeding, however the site is not live yet.

**Christine Butler** (DARD Countryside Management Division) There is currently two agri-environment schemes delivered by CMB - the Environmentally Sensitive Area Scheme and Countryside Management Scheme.

Participants who have completed 10 years in the original ESA scheme, who apply and enter into the new ESA, and those in CMS can volunteer to plant up small areas on the farm (up to 0.2ha) with native broadleaf trees and shrubs. Current advice to those farmers in preferred red squirrel areas is to plant Scot's Pine, Hawthorn, Birch, Rowan, Ash, Willow, Alder, Guelder Rose and Dog Rose. However Oak, Beech and Hazel is very often included in the mixture they plant.

All on farm broadleaved woodlands are entered into the ESA and CMS schemes and are managed through livestock exclusion or very light grazing from June to end September. Red Squirrel feeders are being grant aided through Vision e-plan grant aid.

**Robbie McDonald** (Quercus) – reported that the MSc project studying the feasibility of re-introduction of squirrels into Castle Park Bangor was almost completed..

A study in Tollymore has shown that there is no segregation between reds and greys.

Robbie pointed out that Dave Tosh was going to carry out a study on Pine Martins, and thought that this project could run hand in hand with a red squirrel project.

**Brian Poots** (Woodland Trust) – reported that feeders are being managed, and there have been no sightings of greys in Maghera.

There have been sightings of greys at Prehen, but there is no formal monitoring programme.

**Micheal McGoldrick** (Trinity) – reported that in Wicklow, the greys seemed to be spreading along river valleys and had been sighted in the National Park. The reds seemed to found on higher ground.

Hair tubing is being carried out, and they were working on modifications to traps. He also pointed out that they had done some work on a pine martin “nest” box, which would be of interest to Dave Tosh.

An Irish Mammals website is being developed, but will not be complete until end 05.

Colin Lawton has applied for funding to host a conference in Galway, summer 05.

He also mentioned the proposed translocation project planned in Connemara

**Laura Finnegan** (Trinity) – outlined a genetics study that she is undertaking.

**ACTION** Laura to circulate details of her study and the samples she requires..

## **Squirrel Carcasses**

Michael Griffith outlined the results from the recent parapox study carried out by Fiona McKay. Pox antibodies were found in Geys from all 6 counties.

## **Public Attitude Surveys**

While some people were of the opinion that public attitude surveys and publicity campaigns were useful, others would prefer to continue with control measures in a low key way.

Micheal outlined an occasion when 40 traps were destroyed by animal rights activists, and also thought that it would be better not to go public on the issue of control.

## **Re-introduction and Translocation**

John Fisher (Belfast Zoo) asked for opinions on re-introduction.

John Milburne confirmed that there was no legal reason why this could not be done, so long as it was properly researched and carried out in a structured way so that the squirrels were re-introduced into appropriate areas. IUCN guidelines must also be followed.

It was agreed that Laura’s genetic work would be very important, as re-introduction might be employed more extensively, if it was proven that there was no genetic difference between Red Squirrels in Ireland and the rest of Europe.

The group were also keen to be kept informed of the translocation work in Galway.

## **Forest Service Contribution to SAP**

Richard presented a summary of a review of the effectiveness of red squirrel conservation activities carried out by the Forest Service since 1999. Grey squirrels have colonised forests and woodland blocks in each of the red squirrel preferred areas. It could be concluded that although the Forest Service had made significant effort in some aspects of red squirrel conservation the objectives of the SAP had not been achieved and that a revision of contribution from Forest Service and other bodies was necessary to prevent extinction of the species.

## **Species Action Plan**

It was agreed that the plan needed to be revised so that it reflected SMART objectives, and that a summary of the current situation should be put to the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Group. Revision of the Action Plan would be discussed at the next meeting.

**ACTION** John Milburne

**AOB**

Mike Dobson asked if anyone could provide a simple survey technique for Hair Tubing.  
Robbie agreed to provide a paper on this subject.

**ACTION** Robbie to e-mail details to Colin

**Date of next meeting**

18<sup>th</sup> January 2005 at Forest Service Office, Belvoir Park, Belfast.