

## **Scottish Squirrel Group**

**Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> September 2010**

**SNH Battleby.**

### **Final minutes**

#### **Present:**

**Mairi Cole**, (Chair) (SNH)

**Ian Collier**, (Secretariat) (FCS and Highland Red Squirrel Group)

**Jamie Farquhar**, ConFor

**Ken Neil**, Project Officer (East) – Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels. (SSRS)

**Sian Williams**, Ayrshire Red Squirrel Group

**Hollie Walker**, Project Officer for North East Scotland - Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels

**Andy Wiseman**, European Squirrel Initiative

**Lewis Pate**, Project Officer for Argyll & Trossachs - SSRS,

**Mel Tonkin**, Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels

**Brenda Mayle**, Forest Research

**Simon Poots**, Perth and Kinross Red Squirrel Group

**Karen Ramoo**, Project Co-ordinator\_Red Squirrels in South Scotland

**Roy Dennis**, Private Wildlife Consultant

#### **Apologies:**

**Keith Morton**, RSPB

**James Pringle**, Scottish Rural Property and Business Association

**Mike Libera**, Crown Estates – representing Red Alert South West Scotland

**Johanna Willi**, Fife Red Squirrel Group

**John Massey**, Cowal Red Squirrel Group

**Juliet Robinson**, Red Squirrels in the Highlands

**Stephanie Johnstone**, Project Officer\_Red Squirrels in South Scotland

**Abbie Patterson**, Private Consultant

## **1. Welcome and introductions**

Karen Ramoo, the new project officer for Red Squirrels in South Scotland was welcomed to the group as was Simon Poots who has taken over chair of the Perth and Kinross Red Squirrel Group.

Richard Wales has moved on to take up a post in Kenya, working on the conservation of Grevy's Zebras.

Mairi Cole has been promoted to SNH species group manager which may result in a change of SSG co-chair.

## **2. Minutes of previous meetings and matters arising**

### AP's from September 2009 meeting

**AP 3:** IC to send BM details of survey proposal in Glen Alladale area.  
*discharged*

MC summarised discussion at the last SSRS Steering Group meeting where SJ has outlined welfare aspects of grey squirrel control in South Scotland. This included the use of designated people to humanely despatch animals. RW challenged this stating that this was an exceptional circumstance and was not routinely offered as a service. MC indicated that this was the SSPCA understanding from the meeting and that this would need to be clarified.

**AP 9: MT to clarify the approach in South Scotland:** *ongoing*

### AP's from March 2010 meeting

It was felt that another season of monitoring at Dundonnell would lead to a fuller picture of the re-introduction project.

**AP 1** IC to invite Roy Dennis to next meeting at Battleby. *discharged*

The group asked if there had been any more developments with Dall Estate:

**AP 2** *discharged ( application withdrawn)*

**AP 3** MC to circulate links for Grey Squirrel Control Strategy. *Discharged*

**AP 4** MC will circulate a short questionnaire to clarify usage of the database as a basis for deciding how to take his forward. *Superseded and discharged*

### **Matters arising**

None

## **Re introduction trial at Dundonnell: presentation by Roy Dennis.**

RD provided a power point presentation on the Dundonnell project. It was agreed that the first year report could be circulated as a substitute for notes from the meeting.

Key points from discussion were:

The project released forty three red squirrels. There have been signs of breeding as well as signs of resident animals since. Although RD presented this as a sign of a successful introduction, the SSG were more reticent about this conclusion suggesting that monitoring needed to extend over a couple of generations to prove that the population was sustainable. Evidence of released animals breeding suggested that these individuals had settled well but did not provide evidence that the population was breeding successfully. SSG recommended that the pilot should reasonably be monitored for two generations (c.10 years) before concluding that a population had been established.

Methods of monitoring were discussed. It was noted that few radio-tagged animals were available and that no animals were visibly marked. This made conclusions about their survival or dispersal difficult. Apart from the first releases, many animals were pit tagged but this requires a scanner to recognise individuals. SSG recommended the use of scanners attached to feeder boxes as an option to register the survival of released animals but recognised that this would not apply to offspring unless they were trapped and tagged. RD had investigated this and was told that each unit (feeder scanner) would cost c.£1,000k.

The SSG suggested that a programme of CMR could provide an estimate of population numbers. This may be a good University project and RD was encouraged to investigate this option.

**AP 1** BM to investigate cost and availability of pit tag readers with Forest Research contacts

RD was encouraged by the SSG to publish results to date of re-introduction trial. This publication would act as a reference that could be used by Local group contacts who are getting numerous requests for similar re-introductions elsewhere in Scotland. The publication would result in a marker for wider discussion of the conclusions the project promotes.

In conclusion, the Dundonnell work has provided evidence of the practicalities and opportunities for translocating red squirrels for one site to another. It has also provided some evidence that translocated squirrels will survive and the SSG welcomed this information. However, further work is required to provide evidence of the long-term viability of the population in order to conclude that the translocation was a success.

### **3. Grey Squirrel Control Strategy update.**

At this time there is nothing new to add. Progress will be made when new SNH person (to replace Mairi) is in post

### **4. Strongholds Woodlands update**

A contractor has been appointed: Peter Lurz from Newcastle University. He has visited nearly all the Stronghold sites and relevant FCS / FE offices, and has a first draft of the management advice in preparation. This first draft will be finished by end September, to be offered to the Strongholds Steering Group for review before the Group meets. The Steering Group includes SNH, SWT, SRPBA, WTS, Confor and a representative of LBAPs: Sian Williams

Dr Julia Garitt is preparing a draft paper for Conservancies and FDMs which will be a template for transposing the generic Strongholds advice into local negotiations and site-specific management plans. It is hoped that this template will help guide the discussions with stronghold site owners to be led by the Conservancies / be applicable to NFE. Some site-specific factors are already evident (e.g. the vulnerability of a site to grey incursion or the age structure of the forest). Like the generic guidance, this paper will go to the Strongholds Steering Group for review before the Group meets.

It is anticipated that by the middle of October there will be two draft outputs as well as a strong sense of liaison and central support for red squirrel conservation (with the strongholds being part of a suite of measures).

The SSG would welcome minutes of the steering group meeting.

### **5. Project updates.**

For project updates please find attached for Highland, Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels and Red Squirrels in South Scotland.

### **6. Research Update**

See attached report. The group was encouraged to let Brenda know of any additions to the research update when appropriate and to highlight any items that are out of date.

### **7. UKRSG update**

Draft minutes are to be agreed soon and the final version will appear on the UKRSG web site. The new chair is Brenda Mayle. At the meeting in June the terms of reference were discussed and it appears that the UKRSG may develop to encompass additional groups/stakeholders.

## **8. Data management**

SWT has a new squirrel recording web page at <http://www.swt.org.uk/wildlife/squirrelsightings/>. This replaces the reporting page on the Scottish Squirrel Survey website, with mapping to make it easier for people to enter accurate locations and multiple entries.

The records go straight to a holding database for verification held by SWT, and weekly local reports will be sent to the SSRS project officers which allows local POs to be advised of grey or red squirrels in unusual places. SWT-employed POs will be able to log on to verify records in their areas before they are added to the final SWT database.

Collated data will be mapped quarterly for SSRS and RSSS Project Officers, and data will be shared with local squirrel groups, local biological records centres and the SNH Data Unit (the current holder of the Scottish Squirrel Database) once or twice annually.

In addition the SWT Data Officer, Ian MacKenzie, is in the process of calling in updates of records from the various groups that used to supply the Scottish Squirrel Survey. These will be added to the SWT database, a database conforming to national data standards, which replaces the national database that used to be held by Mel Tonkin on behalf of SNH's Scottish Squirrel Survey. It is anticipated that it will be a while before all data suppliers respond and complete any data-sharing agreements that are required.

## **9. Local Group updates and discussion**

### **Perth and Kinross Red Squirrel Group:**

SP highlighted the welcomed success of securing a grey control programme with the Woodland Trust at Moncreiffe Hill. As a result of this agreement neighbours were willing to carry out complimentary grey control.

During discussion it was noted that there appears to be a lack of work on the ground to control greys despite a policy by Perth and Kinross to deliver biodiversity objectives.

**AP2** KN to contact Perth and Kinross Council to clarify situation

There was concern generally across all local groups present that support for local groups appears to be waning. This is great concern as, although all area

projects were very active with red squirrel conservation, there could be work that was required that could not be done by the project.

**AP3** MC (or SNH rep) to draft a document which outlines a framework for integrating voluntary and professional action in red squirrel conservation. The SSG need to promote the vitality of volunteers in a sustainable approach to red squirrel conservation, highlighting particularly what volunteers can gain from involvement in local groups and red squirrel conservation in Scotland.

#### **10. AOB**

It was noted in all the main project areas involving grey control that use of SRDP funding was vital for success of control on private land. It was noted that the quality of reporting on results was crucial.

**AP 4** Jamie Farquhar to send paragraph of concern re SRDP payments to IC for circulation and forwarding on to relevant contact in SRDP.

#### **11. DONM**

**Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> March 2011, Forest Research Roslin**  
**Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> September 2011, SNH Battleby**

Ian Collier, 8<sup>th</sup> November 2010