

# Scottish Squirrel Group

Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2008

Forest Research  
Northern Research Station  
Roslin

## Final minutes

### Present:

**Mairi Cole**, (Chair) (SNH)  
**Ian Collier**, (Secretariat) (FCS and Highland Red Squirrel Group)  
**Mel Tonkin**, Scottish Squirrel Survey Co-ordinator  
**Brian Tasker**, Dundee City Ranger  
**Juliet Robinson**, Red Squirrels in the Highlands  
**Karen Pickles**, Ayrshire Red Squirrel Group  
**Andy Wiseman**, European Squirrel Initiative  
**Mike Libera**, Crown Estates – representing Red Alert South West Scotland  
**Ken Neil**, Tayside Squirrel Officer  
**Abbie Patterson**, National Trust for Scotland  
**Richard Wales**, Red Squirrels in South Scotland  
**Sian Williams**, Ayrshire Red Squirrel Group  
**Brenda Mayle**, Forest Research  
**Celia Rogers**, Grampian Squirrel Group  
**Jamie Farquhar**, ConFor  
**James Pringle**, Scottish Rural Property and Business Association  
**Stephanie Meyer- Gleaves**, Red Squirrels in South Scotland  
**Jay Birkinshaw**, Perth and Kinross Squirrel Group  
**Gavin Skipper**, Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, Red Squirrel Working Group, Also representing Cowal Group  
**Jo Ellis**, FCS Species Policy Advisor

### Apologies:

**Paul Gallagher**, Scottish Wildlife Trust  
**Stuart Brookes**, Scottish Wildlife Trust  
**John Massey**, Cowal Red Squirrel Group  
**James Downie**, Trossachs and Loch Lomond National Park, Red Squirrel Working Group  
**Paddy and Loiuise Garthwaite**, Perth & Kinross Squirrel Group  
**Graham Christer**, Angus Squirrel Group

## **1. Welcome and introductions**

Jo Ellis ( FCS Species Policy Advisor) was welcomed and gave a presentation to the group on Stronghold Woodlands ( see below)

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

### Action Points from September 2005:

**AP4: MC** to invite UKRSG up to a future next SSG meeting: *Carried over*

### Action Points from September 2006 meeting

**AP 5:** BM to supply reporting sheet in DEFRA grey squirrel control project to members of the SSG: *Superseded*

### Action points from January 2007 meeting

**AP 5: MC** to contact Pest Controllers organisation to clarify the law and to pursue the issue of the trap manufacturers including a notification of the legality about releasing grey squirrels when selling traps. *discharged*

**AP 7: MC** to request detailed map of GB Squirrelpox cases to date from the UKRSG: *discharged: now on UKRSG web site*

### Non – Native Group

**AP 3: MC** to check with Angela Robinson regarding the position of grey squirrel within this group: *ongoing: limited success, contact will be made with Hugh Dignon.*

### Squirrel Conference, Dundee

**AP 9: MT** to produce conference proceedings within the next six months: *discharged.*

### Action points from March 2008 meeting

There was general concern that some pest controllers appeared to be using warfarin in plastic boxes that could be easily accessed by squirrels. However, there was also some question as to whether the pesticide in question was warfarin or a second generation pesticide regulated through different (animal welfare) legislation.

**AP 1: BM** to check with the Pest Control Association.

Alan Buckle from the Pest Controllers Association was contacted. He stated that the incidents of non-target squirrel death was very rare ( one incident in the last 18 years). Where bait is to be employed an Environmental Risk Assessment would be carried out and would flag up issues regarding what bait would be used. The International Pest Controller Journal is a useful reference document for further information: *discharged*

**AP 2: JM** will circulate a report on the use of rope bridges: as yet this is not in the public domain: *ongoing*

**AP 3: MT** to complete report on the outline report for the SWT/SNH project by the 21<sup>st</sup> March: *discharged*

**AP 4: MC** to circulate the above report to interested parties and arrange a discussion meeting in April: *report circulated, but no meeting was arranged: superseded*

### **Matters arising**

None

### **3. Membership of SSG**

The proposal to form two groups within the SSG was tabled by MC and IC.

MC noted problems with the size of the Group. The membership list had 28 representatives and this was exceeding a manageable size for meetings, both in terms of the business to attend to and the room arrangements. A proposal was made that the group be split into two: one dealing with local project matters and the other dealing with matters of national policy. Both groups would have sight of the same agenda items but would target discussions differently. The groups would be linked through representation, with the Chair of the local group meetings attending the policy meetings to relay the outcome of discussions. This has proved an effective format in Wales for the last two years.

This received a negative response from some of those present with concerns expressed that local group views would be sidelined in national policy.

It was suggested that 2 local group reps would be needed on the core policy group and there will still be a need to find a way to engage with local issues

Support for this proposal was also raised, with some members agreeing the need to streamline the SSG.

**AP1 All:** To pass comments on the future structure of the group to IC who will circulate to all group members in preparation for agreeing way forward at the next meeting in March. When considering this proposal members might like to take on board the following questions that were raised :

- What do members want from the SSG?
- What are the objectives of the SSG?

**AP2 IC:** to send out Terms of Reference of the SSG to stimulate thoughts/comments

### **4. Local Squirrel Group updates**

See local updates attached.

MC noted the call for written updates from local groups. This format had been initiated to allow more time at meetings to discuss policy issues. However, the Secretariat was not receiving updates from all groups.

**AP3: All local group reps to send written updates to IC for inclusion with the minutes.**

Red Squirrels in South Scotland is as below:

- Richard Wales is meeting with landowners in pox monitoring areas and supporting SRDP applications and is presently concentrating on the Drumlanrig proposal.
- Phase 4 of RSSS was launched on 27<sup>th</sup> August at Drumlanrig Castle by the Minister for the Environment, Michael Russell.
- The trap loan scheme still running as are surveys and raising public awareness
- Stephanie is the Education and Community officer for RSSS although she is helping with SRDP applications where geographically prudent.

**AP4 RW:** to send synopsis of RSSS project to IC for circulation

There is concern that no trapping is being done between Aberdeen and Dundee to stop the two populations meeting.

**AP5 MC:** to check with the Aberdeen Ring Road planning dept to assess possibility of including early trapping of greys to the south of Aberdeen.

## **5. Establishing and monitoring red squirrel populations**

See Mel Tonkin's summary attached.

## **6. Prioritising Woods where conservation work will be focused**

See Jo Ellis's Power point presentation attached.

The Stronghold Woodlands (SW) have been ranked to date resulting in a list of 44 sites and will be further refined down to 20 using information received from FCS/SNH and local squirrel groups. The 20 sites will then be subject to a week's consultation with SSG before contact is made with the relevant landowners

After contact and agreement with the landowners the full consultation of 20 sites will be done with stakeholders in the Autumn. This will be issued for wider consultation in January 2009 and will be supported with information on the Grey Squirrel Control Strategy and priority habitat management.

Points were raised on the presentation as follows:

There was concern that the sub-optimal habitats for reds would also be subject to incursion by greys. Bryce and Carmel studies have shown that greys will carry out day visits in to sub optimal habitats but would not breed.

A query was raised to ask if greys have ever reached full carrying capacity in Scotland and if so, did they then occupy the sub-optimal habitat? It was suggested that even if they did, full capacity would not be sustained as populations fluctuate widely in relation to food supply.

Stronghold woods appear to be our insurance policy. If so why have a geographical spread of woodlands throughout Scotland?

It was the view of the group that many of the landowners they had been involved with to date are in favour with squirrel conservation and it was hoped that the SW concept would be well received by others

A memorandum of understanding would need to be signed by appropriate parties to sign up for long term management of the SW.

Concern was expressed that the SRDP funding resources may be stretched leading to the focus of funding on SW only.

## **7. Improving woodlands for red squirrels**

No points raised

## **8. Minimise or reduce threat from grey squirrels – Squirrelpox virus – update and action**

The situation in Dumfries and Galloway is getting worse with a significant increase in sero-positive records in greys over the last three months. Drumlanrig has suffered a big incursion of sero-positive greys. Poxed reds have been recorded at Langholm, Moffat and Drumlanrig.

The Newmill sero-positive record cannot be confirmed and will be re-tested.

## **9. Research into red squirrel conservation – update**

See update from Brenda Mayle attached.

**AP5 All:** to double-check and update via BM this valuable research summary.

## **10. Implement the strategy locally with central support – local group support**

Mel Tonkin has been appointed the co-ordinator of the SWT/SNH 'Scottish Project' and her report to the SSG is attached.

The steering group are keen to change the title of the project and would welcome any suggestions

**AP6 All:** suggestions of names and logo's to MT ASAP

It is hoped that the Eastern Post will commence in October and the North East post in April.

Baseline data on which to base the success of grey control will be a vital part of this project.

The Scottish Squirrel Survey website will continue as is being maintained by Mel on a voluntary basis at this time.

IC was concerned about the information supplied to date and progress since the last meeting in March in particular with relation to the Highlands that appeared to be at the end of the list of posts to be filled with no indication that this will ever happen.

Referring to the last minutes where it was highlighted that 'it would be beneficial for all to support a single package and not compete for limited resources'. Views from some local groups supported the need for Highland to approach its local funders to secure the Highland RSCO post.

#### **11. Promoting the strategy and raising awareness of red squirrel conservation**

No points raised

#### **12. Monitor and assess progress of the plan - local groups views**

No points raised

#### **13. UKRSG update**

The minutes will soon be placed on the UKRSG web site.

#### **14. AOB**

A proposal is underway to re-introduce RS into Dundonnel Estate near Ullapool. Contact IC if further information is required.

#### **15. DONM**

**10<sup>th</sup> March 2009, SNH Battleby**

**3<sup>rd</sup> September 2009, at Forest Research, Roslin.**

Ian Collier

25<sup>th</sup> October 2008