

Scottish Squirrel Group

6 October 2004

**Forest Research
Northern Research Station
Roslin**

Present:

Mairi Cole, (Chair)
Ian Collier, (Secretariat) (Highland Red Squirrel Group)
Brenda Mayle, Forest Research
Jamie Farquhar, Forestry & Timber Association
James Pringle, Border Squirrel Management Group
Zoe Smolka, Red Squirrels in South Scotland Project
Elly Hamilton, Red Squirrels in South Scotland Project
Gus Jones, Badenoch & Strathspey Conservation Group
Abbie Patterson, National Trust for Scotland
Gavin Legge, Grampian Squirrel Group
Mel Tonkin, Scottish Squirrel Survey/Co-ordinator
Karen Pickles, Ayrshire Squirrel Group
Kenny Auld, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, Red Squirrel Working Group
Mike Flynn, SSPCA
Chris Waddell, Central Squirrel Group

Apologies

Amy Moggach, Highland Red Squirrel Group
Julian Warman, Scottish Wildlife Trust
Chris MacGregor, Perth & Kinross Squirrel Group
Kate Farrar, Dundee Squirrel Group
Alan Ross, Angus Red Squirrel Group

1. Welcome and introductions

Alex Morris has moved on to other duties within the FCS. For this meeting Ian Collier will be acting as secretariat.

2. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

Stuart Barbour had proposed changes with reference to the paper he had submitted at the previous meeting.
The changes were agreed and a revised copy of the minutes (March 2004) are attached.

AP1 Discharged

- AP2 RSSS had sent proposals in relation to ecology of greys in conifers. No other Suggestions' received.
- AP3 To be taken forward to next meeting.
- AP4 Discharged
- AP5 Discharged
- AP6 Mel Tonkin is now in post.
- AP7 UKRSG are working on this subject. To be carried forward to next meeting.
- AP8 No comments received. Discharged

3. Local Squirrel Group updates

Written reports were received from Highland, Central, Ayrshire, National Trust for Scotland, Dundee, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park and the Red Squirrel in South Scotland Project. These are attached in Annex 1.

GL was pleased to say that he had secured funding from a major oil company and actually had cash in the bank to spend. He is developing a web site for the Grampian Group, which he hopes will be live by end of November. He was also pleased to learn that Pauline Jewett from the Ayrshire Red Squirrel Group has moved to his area.

As he sits on all the scoping meetings in the Aberdeen City area and Lower Deeside and Donside (as a woodland officer for FCS) he is able to ensure that squirrel sensitivities are taken on board in planning for forest operations. He had received reports of an overall reduction in grey squirrel sightings in the areas adjacent to Aberdeen City this year.

EH queried the progress of the Priority Woodlands Report and also queried as to whether the document was open for comment – to which the response was no. MC indicated that the report was now back with her but changes to maps have been requested by SNH to make the report clearer. BM to progress the changes on the maps.

GJ was concerned about the lack of finer detail on the map details to date in relation to the area of woodland designated as Priority Woodland. He has a sensitive planning issue that will require the exact boundary of the priority woodland.

AP 1 BM will send shape file information to SNH and FCS to allow the detailed information to be made available.

MT suggested that she could be the contact for this kind of information, as she had recognised that not all groups have FCS/SNH representation i.e. Perth and Kinross. GJ has put in an Cairngorms National Park Authority 'Communities in the National Park' grant scheme bid for a local squirrel leaflet, to be distributed throughout the Cairngorms National Park area.

MC informed the group that the distribution data has now been sent to the National Biodiversity Network and should be soon available on the NBN website.

IC noted that the HRSG are maintaining strong links with the Highland LBAP. The subject of predation by pine martens is becoming more of a subject in conversation with many interested parties.

KP noted that the Ayrshire Red Squirrel group were having some problems with finding people who were able to continue acting as volunteers. Agency staff involved

in the group are doing so as volunteers, they are not being given any time from organisations for involvement in the group. The group recently submitted an HLF bid for a pre-project planning grant – it was unsuccessful but they have been asked to re-submit for the project itself. But they also have to approach relevant agencies for funding.

CW is now the new chairman of the central Group following the departure of Lynne Campbell.

BM reminded the group that the Research Information Note on Habitat use by Red and Grey Squirrels (Bryce and Cartmel) was on its way (hopefully to be published by the end of the financial year).

The research on immunocontraception was still on hold.

A draft paper is on its way to the FC publications department with details on the variation of coning of SS/NS.

EH raised the question as to whether the use of 'Super Sitka' had the potential to reduce coning (more trees energy being put into growth rather than cone production) and whether an earlier clear fell date would affect the use of the tree by squirrels.

This was noted by BM

JF A new manifesto had been launched by the FTA called 'A level playing field for Forestry.' Within this document there is a reference to squirrel control being subject of high priority. The agenda of this manifesto has been agreed by FC (amongst others).

4. UKRSG Update

The minutes of last meeting are attached.

AP 2 MC will circulate note to group members on UKBAP review with these minutes.

5. Grey Squirrel Control

(this item was dealt with at the beginning of the meeting as MF had to leave early.)

Much discussion occurred on this subject!

MF was able to give a summary of the SSPCA views at this meeting:

- the SSPCA are not against killing of greys
- the need for the head of the grey to be clearly visible so that the killing blow can be delivered as accurately as possible.
- the need for a training of people who will be carrying out the dispatching

The following is summary of discussion that took place:

Dispatching grey squirrels

Contribution from the SSPCA:

Once a grey is trapped it becomes a captive animal under the Protection of Animals (Scotland) Act 1912.

The sack method is acceptable if the first blow can be targeted and the grey killed outright

The problem with the current sack method is that the head of the grey cannot be easily seen and as a result the first blow may not kill.

SSPCA do not approve of the sack method as it stands but would accept the method if first blow would dispatch the grey. They stated that there needs to be a guarantee of a clean kill.

A system will need to be developed that can see and identify the head for a clean kill.

It is acceptable to approach BASC with options to ensure clean kill and the SSG approach the scientific community for best specification of restraining devices.

It was proposed that, in light of the discussion at the meeting, each individual local group decide how to continue controlling greys. MF stressed it had to be the individual's decision as they are the ones that would lay themselves open to prosecution if any case went to court.

Contributions from the SSG:

Dispatch by gun of enough power to kill instantly may involve firearm's legislation. It was suggested that would be undesirable to ask volunteers to carry firearms. UKRSG is currently examining the use of air weapons as an option

Dispatch of the grey squirrel using a firearm and a crush cage was agreed not to be preferred mainly due to the use of firearms by volunteers.

The most prevalent method of dispatch used to date in the field was the sack method. It was agreed that some derivative of that method may be a good way forward. One favoured option is a clear disposable sack that would enable identification of the head and no risk of disease transmission through blood contamination.

Training

Contribution from SSPCA :

Credited Training scheme is seen as a way forward.

Contributions from SSG:

It was suggested that the level of training and implementation should be up to each individual group. However, it was suggested by one representative that some volunteers would not travel any distance to attend a training course due to lack of

time and resources. An alternative suggestion was for each group to have a nominated, trained person to train volunteers in their group at a convenient time and location

There is an urgent need for best practice guidelines

MF would check with chairman of SSPCA if the proposal of using a clear sack and an associated training scheme would satisfy their concerns.

AP 3 MC and BM to develop an acceptable method and training plan for humane dispatch of grey squirrels

6. Scottish Squirrel Co-ordinator

MT stated that her role was to see forward proper distribution of squirrel records and try to co-ordinate local groups in relation to surveying priorities and training. Work done to date includes a well publicised, official launch of her job and attendance at two local group meetings. It was noted that the information on woodland structure, ownership and associated data was not held at group locations and she will liase with FCS to gain this information.

AP 4 MT to liase with FCS regarding this required information

In order to develop a skeletal programme of surveying and monitoring a steering group will need to be set up: The following people volunteered:

Mairi Cole
Ian Collier
Gus Jones
Jamie Farquhar
Elly Hamilton
Zoe Smolka
Kenny Auld

AP 5 MT to kick start this group

For the benefit of the group MC offered the following as a definition of surveillance and Monitoring:

Surveillance is a short term survey with no identifiable long term goal.
Monitoring is a regular survey with a long term management aim.

7. SSG: Future Direction/Terms of Reference

The two submissions from the FTA to the SSG were highlighted:

- a review of the SSG aims, objectives and terms of reference
- proposed SSG Terms of Reference .

(see attached)

These papers were mainly drawn up by James Pringle with help from Andy Wiseman and Stuart Barbour. The FTA have a commitment to continue to control the non-native grey.

JF stated that the FTA members have concerns about existing SSG Terms of Reference and they need to move forward within this current structure of the SSG but encompass a Northern Britain remit. There are even problems with large numbers of reds in the North that may need controlling due to damage being caused to the conifer woodlands. He stated that the FTA would not want a separate group for grey squirrel control to benefit timber.

Comments from the floor were invited on the two papers

KP stated that the dissemination of information had been done and current SSG was a great help to the Ayrshire Group

GL Expressed his concern at the negativity of the review paper.

JP added that the document was not aimed at the members of the group, only the remit of the group. You cannot de-couple the reasons of timber and red squirrel conservation for control of greys

MC added that the SSG started because of the UKBAP, drawing people together. It has no Executive function, no independent source of funding and, consequently no ability to create policy. It was clear from the inception of the group that some local groups would not participate if the SSG was promoting grey control for the purpose of timber protection. In the past, private owners have been invited onto the group to fill this gap but either failed to respond to the invitation or dropped out of the meetings. The first aim on the Terms of Reference (relating to grey control) was raised by the FTA representative on the group at the time and was a concession to try and maintain a wide representation. Subsequent work by the group has not prioritised this aim as grey squirrel control was only considered relevant to some members within the context of red squirrel conservation. The group has reflected little subsequent interest in expanding to include the remit of the FTA for timber protection issues.

Any new sub groups formed have to maintain links with other groups.

KP stated that as far as the group was concerned, red conservation was the only reason for grey control but agreed more emphasis on control was required.

JF If the SSG cannot take on board timber then the SSG will find it very difficult to engage private owners.

MT stated that what was perhaps required was a national version of the Borders Squirrel Management Group, can the local groups not include taking on board timber issues?

GJ expressed concern that limited resources at the moment were targeted at red conservation areas and if resources were used out with these areas to benefit timber they would not necessarily be benefiting the reds. In some areas grey control would benefit conservation of reds, but in others it would not.

MC declared that she could not guarantee continued chairmanship after next October due to the SNH re-location to Inverness.

JF was disappointed about this forecast and enquired as to what the future SNH role would be if there were to be National Squirrel Group (with more of a grey control for the benefit of timber remit)

MC replied that she could not say but would suggest the SSG would become more woodland orientated rather than a red squirrel SAP and that it would come under the remit of the SNH Woodland Group. However, it was likely any involvement in this capacity would be restricted to the conservation of native woodlands as the timber protection remit was led by FCS. SNH would take a back seat on such a group.

JP when work was finished in Priority Woodlands then range of work could be expanded out with these areas.

MC there is a limited area beyond the boundary of red squirrel presence in which they would benefit from grey squirrel control: how far back into grey only areas should control go into under this justification?

KP suggested a two year compromise where some points will be common and some will diverge. If the SSG stays as it is would the FTA be part of the SSG? JF replied they would be but would stay with 'an aura of disappointment'

JF enquired whether Andy Wiseman was part of the SSG and would he represent European Squirrel Initiative. (see web site for further information on ESI: www.europeansquirrelinitiative.org)

AP 7 MC to clarify Andy Wisemans' membership of the group.

JF enquired whether the group would be happy to produce a Scottish Strategy for Grey Squirrel Control even if the groups decision was not to support the two papers that have been presented by the FTA.

The meeting agreed that the FTA proposals be taken away and considered and ideas presented at the next meeting. (many groups were not present at the time of this discussion)

AP 8 Local Squirrel Groups to feedback thoughts on FTA proposals and Scottish Strategy for Grey Squirrels' to SSG chair

8. AOB

MC The SNH publication, 'Red Squirrels' (*Naturally Scottish*), is now available as an 'E book' on the SNH website.

MC kindly offered to look into the availability of promotional items relating to red squirrels in SNH.

AP 9 If any of the groups would like any promotional products such as posters, badges, fridge magnets would they please contact MC.

JF A new cross party group of ministers with interest in forestry is to meet on 27th October 2004.

JF A project is soon to be launched to survey Native Woodland distribution.

AP 10 IC to provide MT with further information on this survey

IC raised the issue of the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004. The full details of this Act would perhaps be better discussed at the next meeting when fuller details would be available.

AP 11 IC to ensure item is on next meetings agenda.

9. DANM

9th March 2005 at SNH Battleby
7th September 2005 at Roslin.

Ian Collier
23 December 2004