

Scottish Squirrel Group

9th March 2005

Forest Research
Northern Research Station
Roslin

Final Minutes

Present:

Mairi Cole, (Chair)
Ian Collier, (Secretariat) (Highland Red Squirrel Group)
Gordon Patterson, Forestry Commission Scotland
Jamie Farquhar, Forestry & Timber Association
James Pringle, Border Squirrel Management Group
Sue Hearn, Red Squirrels in South Scotland Project
Elly Hamilton, Red Squirrels in South Scotland Project
Gavin Legge, Grampian Squirrel Group
Mel Tonkin, Scottish Squirrel Survey Co-ordinator
Karen Pickles, Ayrshire Red Squirrel Group
Gavin Skipper, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, Red Squirrel Working Group
Liz Poulson, Forest Research, Northern Research Station
Janie Steele, North Argyll Squirrel Group
John Stark, Ladybank Forest Users Group

Apologies

Amy Moggach, Highland Red Squirrel Group
Julian Warman, Scottish Wildlife Trust
Chris MacGregor and **Jay Burkinshaw**, Perthshire & Kinross Squirrel Group
Alan Ross, Angus Squirrel Group
Brenda Mayle, Forest Research
Neil Cowie RSPB
Andy Wiseman, European Squirrel Initiative

1. Welcome and introductions

Gavin Skipper is now the contact for the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park. Gordon attended the meeting to introduce FCS views on future remit of the SSG and to relay details of the revised Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme in relation to the conservation of red squirrels. John Stark attended on behalf of the Lady Bank Forest Users Group: a group with a keen interest in red squirrels. Janie Steele is Ranger for the FCS based at Oban and is keen to set up a North Argyll Squirrel Group. Sue Hearn is the new Red Squirrel Conservation Officer for Dumfries and Galloway.

2. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

Mel Tonkin raised the point that the last minutes indicated she had supported the control of greys for timber benefit being part of the new SSG terms of reference. In fact she was clarifying the FTA view not agreeing with it.

Action points from March 2004:

AP3 To be taken forward to next meeting. (Forest Research Report on the way)

AP7 Discharged

Action points from October 2004:

AP1 This information is on the way

AP 2 This appeared not to have been received by members: IC to send again.

AP 3 To be dealt with later in this meetings agenda. See minutes below

AP4 Interested parties should approach their local Forestry Commission Office for this information.

AP5 The initial progress of this group is going well.

(no AP 6)

AP7 Andy Wiseman has now agreed to be the ESI representative on the SSG

AP8 None received to date. Discussion to be held later in this meeting.

AP9 Some requested by Elly Hamilton: offer still open!

AP10 As Gordon Paterson was present to summarise the project:

This Native Woodland Survey intends to map the location, type (NVC/HAP) and what condition our Native Woodlands are in.

It will provide a baseline for more detailed information e.g. species composition, structure etc.

The pilot work is commencing now in four areas, one in Clyde, one in Tweeddale and two in Highland. It is hoped the pilot surveys on 4 areas of 1000ha will be completed by spring 2006.

It is a five-year programme and the minimum area may be between .1 and .5ha.

If anybody requires further information please contact Zoe Laird at FCS Silvan House.

AP11 To be deferred until next meeting

AP 1: MC to contact BM to clarify progress of Cartmel Information Note

JF reminded the meeting that the immuno-contraception issue has not gone to sleep: it is still a live subject.

3. Local Squirrel Group updates

Written reports were received from Highland, Ayrshire, Angus, Perth and Kinross, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park and the Red Squirrel in South Scotland Project. These are attached to these minutes.

In addition to the written responses the following points were raised:

MT will try to stimulate more interest in the Angus Group.

If anybody is interested in using the Nutcase PACK please contact EH.

KP has not heard results of recent HLF bid

GS presented example of the park website where records can be submitted. The web site address/downloadable form is <http://www.lochlomond-trossachs.org/downloads/rangers/squirrel.pdf>

GL (Grampian Squirrel Group) was pleased to say the website is up and running and leaflets/badges are on the way. FCS Rangers are hosting a surveying technique workshop with GL and MT providing instruction.

JS stressed that the Ladybank group was very keen to control greys and was pleased with the recent trend for local landowners to take on grey control

JSt hopes to set up a north Argyll group (south Argyll could be classed as a separate area.)

4. UKRSG Update

AP 2: IC will circulate the last UKRSG minutes.

A summary of the January poxvirus (formerly known as parapox virus) meeting was presented by MC (on behalf of Brenda Mayle)

5. Grey Squirrel Control

The whole group agreed that the use of multi-capture traps where reds are present would require clarification.

Elly Hamilton has produced a trapping advice note: **AP 3: MT to circulate sheet to group.**

It was agreed by the group to continue developing a new method of dispatching grey squirrels.

6. Scottish Squirrel Co-ordinator

MT tabled a discussion point to ask what members of the group thought of local groups acting as co-ordinating point for all squirrel records. It was generally accepted that this was a good way forward.

MT requested that all squirrel records be sent to her ASAP. Preferably in the format she had circulated previously (including the metadata sheet)

Links to the Tracking Mammals Partnership should be strengthened.

AP: 4 All local groups to submit their records to Mel

Current information and guidance on red squirrel conservation was discussed.

There is a clear and definite need for more guidance on habitat management for red squirrel conservation.

AP5: IC to contact Gordon Patterson regarding Guidance Note on woodland management for red squirrel conservation.

AP6: MT will distribute bibliography of all literature available relating to this subject.

AP7: MC to circulate the report produced by MT for SNH on “*An outline support package for local groups*”.

7. SSG: Future Direction/Terms of Reference

No comments on the proposed change to the Terms of Reference (from the FTA) were received since the last meeting.

The points raised around the table were as follows:

MT Limited resources are available to do basic red conservation work let alone control of greys for timber quality reasons.

KP The Ayrshire group is about grey control for red conservation and it appears that some grey control for timber quality is out-with the groups resources. However the group does value and need support of landowners.

GL agreed with the Ayrshire group's comments

IC There are no known greys in Highland so no view can be made at this time on behalf of the HRSG

EH stated that the RSSS have indicated that it is not appropriate to make a response.

GS The invasion of greys could happen in the future but no resources would be available for grey control at this stage.

KP There is an argument for the best use of resources: to identify pinch points, buffer zones to establish a containment band rather than identify Priority Woodlands.

JP Should the grey strategy be organised through the SSG Secretariat?

GP The FCS overview:

The Scottish Squirrel Strategy is a key document. How can the FCS, with local and national partners deliver a strategy in priority areas and pinch/cut off points? The existing strategy does not extend to grey control against timber damage outside important red squirrel conservation areas. If timber and conservation are complimentary then it is acceptable if effective. It is important to provide incentives to

landowners. An appropriate way of delivering this grey control strategy is through the GB wide Non-native Species Working Group.

There is a Broad-leaved Timber Group in existence whose recommendation is due out in the autumn. This recommendation can then feed in to the Forestry Strategy. The local methodology and well-established techniques are in place already. The role of the SSG is challenging enough already without considering grey control for timber benefit.

MC: SNH role is focusing on the SAP for red squirrels. If there is a change in the SSG remit then SNH involvement may be on a Woodland management basis and not SAP. It is really down to the Local Groups to decide what future they wish for the SSG membership and objectives.

JP Suggested that the original aim of the SSG of “promoting a consistent and positive approach to the management of red and grey squirrels” was quite acceptable except that the SSG had not achieved that aim. While the T of R could well do with updating, the Aims and Objectives did not preclude grey squirrel control and if the groups felt they did not wish to change them, they could simply be taken more account of. He welcomes the recognition that grey control is required and restated his belief that it should not matter whether greys are controlled for timber protection or for red conservation – the net effect is the same. He accepts that there is more money available for red conservation in Priority Areas but landowners, land managers and shoot managers may need timber protection and /or biodiversity arguments (or any other argument available) to encourage them to control greys at their own expense out with Priority Areas.

The landowners need easier access to grants e.g. having fewer forms to fill in.

JF we are fortunate to have reds in Scotland. It is the ostrich principle to say that the greys will go away. They will creep into areas where they are absent at the moment. If Scotland does not have a grey control strategy; this will be a great loss. It would be better overall if the policy was adopted by the SSG. We have the opportunity now to do something. A grey control strategy should be adopted on a Scottish wide basis

GP the Non- native Species Working Group and the Broad-leaved Timber Group should launch the grey control strategy along with FCS, SNH etc.

JF At the moment the FTA recognises the SSG reluctance but notes that if resources allowed the SSG would support the grey control strategy. JF feels it could be drawn up by the SSG now.

To summarise:

Most groups recognise the need for grey control for red conservation reasons. However, all local groups work with limited resources and could not encompass additional grey squirrel control work where this was conducted for reasons other than red squirrel conservation. The SSG recognise the need for landowner co-operation in achieving red squirrel objectives and, for that reason, offered their support to the landowners through recommending grey squirrel control be an issue taken on by the Scottish Executives Non-native Species Group. The chair offered to take up this issue with the SE on behalf of the SSG and report back at the next meeting on the remit, membership, funds and time scale of the group being established.

AP 8: MC to contact SE and obtain information on remit, membership, funds and time scale of Non Native Group.

8. AOB

Red squirrel conservation and the SFGS. (The SFGS was covered as a morning item as Gordon Paterson had to leave early)

GP Following the refinement of the SFGS there is a need to define priority sites and how to identify the rationalisation of resources. SFGS grants are available under the Stewardship and Restocking categories to benefit red squirrel conservation. Where a priority site can be identified then 90% grants may be available

EH requested that the SFGS be more accessible. At the moment it is difficult to process and the supporting information required is exhausting.

SH The monitoring aspects of any application needs expert knowledge.

JF Queried whether the grey squirrel would be classed as a predator and eligible for SFGS under S3 (code 333) **AP: 9 IC to clarify with FCS.**

JF Has there been any feedback that the cost of capture is enough even with the revised SFGS rates?

AP 10: IC to send out copies of 'SFGS and red squirrels' note.

BAP Review

The problem in Scotland is that we do not know what the resource is. The UKRSG suggest that minimum targets be set based on a range e.g. the number of 10k squares that contain red squirrel records. This was debated and was considered to be the only option available to the SSG

AP11: MC to identify the baseline squirrel resource for the revised BAP, based on existing Scottish Squirrel Database information.

Nature Conservation Act

It was agreed to defer this item until the next meeting.

9. DANM

JF suggested that it would be a good idea to invite a representative from south of the border and indeed EH had concerns about the north/south divide.

MC suggested that the guest slot idea be re-visited. The group agreed that we would invite Richard Pow from the Forestry Commission to the next meeting. **AP12: MC to contact Richard Pow and invite him to the next meeting.**

Next meeting date:

7th September Roslin

Ian Collier
11th May 2005