

Scottish Squirrel Group

14 March 2003

**Forest Research
Northern Research Station
Roslin**

Present:

Alex Morris, FC (Chair)
Mairi Cole, SNH (Secretariat)
Stuart Barber, Forest & Timber Association
Baxter Cooper, Falkirk and Clackmannan Squirrel group
Ian Collier, Highland Squirrel Group
Andy Wiseman, Border Squirrel Management Group
Jamie Farquhar, Forest & Timber Association
Sarah Oakley, Red Squirrels in South Scotland
Zoe Smolka, Red Squirrels in South Scotland
Stephen Willis, National Trust for Scotland/Ayrshire Squirrel Group
Julian Warman, SWT
Gus Jones, Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group
Gavin Legge, Grampian Squirrel Group
Alice Broom, Forest Research

Apologies:

Jamie Carruthers, Red Alert South West
Abbie Patterson, National Trust for Scotland
Brenda Mayle, Forest Research
Polly Freeman, Perth & Kinross Squirrel Group
Alan Ross, Angus Squirrel Group
Lesley Brown, CARSE

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed representatives to the meeting. Particular welcome was given to representatives of Falkirk and Clackmannan who are seeking to establish a local squirrel group.

2. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising.

AP1: MC to investigate inclusion of Scottish Squirrel Database on the NBN.
MC reported that this had not been discharged but would be carried over.

AP1: MC to investigate inclusion of the Scottish Squirrel Database on the NBN.

AP2: Agenda item 3
AP3: Agenda item 3
AP4: Agenda item 3
AP5: Carried over

AP2: Chair/Secretariat for prepare implementation plan for inclusion in revised Strategy and circulation prior to next meeting

AP6: Agenda item 3

AP7: Discharged
 AP8: Discharged
 AP9: Agenda item 6

3. UK Red Squirrel Group update

AM attended the UKRSG meeting in Wales on 17/18 December 2002.

Funding

Issues of funding were discussed (actions points 2 & 4). The Wildlife Trusts (N England) are in the process of producing a note on bids for HLF funding. This should help address the shortfall in funding available. The UKRSG also agreed that funding for the SSG is a problem and agreed to take up this issue also with DEFRA as one of the limitations on delivering the UK BAP. AW commented that a joint bid to HLF encompassing the north of England and south of Scotland would have been preferable but this had now been discouraged by the English contingent as it could militate against success. RSSS are now investigating the possibility of submitting an HLF bid which means that four separate bids will now be submitted.

Advice Notes

The UKRSG is still establishing a group to progress development of Guidance/Advice notes (action point 6). More information on this group will be given at the next meeting in April.

Anglesey

The UKRSG visited the Anglesey Red Squirrel project. It appears that there are problems of parapox in the grey squirrels present and, although extensive trapping is being conducted, there is currently no strategic approach to their removal. The project received 3 years of funding (under Objective 1) of around £250,000 and a further 3-year bid of £900,000 for all species has been submitted under Objective 1. AM noted some concerns about the plans to re-introduce red squirrels to the area before the grey squirrels had been removed and noted the likelihood of failure of the re-introduction under these circumstances. Group members requested that the information on the project be circulated. AM undertook to obtain this.

AP3: AM to obtain electronic copies of the Anglesey Project for circulation

Site Management Plans

AM suggested, to the UKRSG, that it was inappropriate to write SMPs for all sites in Scotland. The UKRSG suggested that generic guidance could be produced, possibly in the form of an Advice Note. AM also requested that Scotland be released from this obligation under the Implementation Plan. He was requested to write to the UKRSG formally on this. Wording agreed was "*Where resources are available, site-specific advice can be compiled. Elsewhere, generic advice will be available.*"

AP4: AM to write to UKRSG requesting release of SSG from preparation of SMPs in all Scottish sites.

SO noted that the RSSS project was currently preparing SMPs for sites in the Borders. A short-list of 25 sites have been identified (from a list of around 200). Discussion concluded that the format of the plans were as site-specific guidance, not formal SMPs. The format of the product would be consistent with that agreed in the north of England (FC England contract) although this was currently still under development.

Warfarin

AM noted that the paper written by SB, and distributed by AW, had been noted at the UKRSG. However, as this had not been submitted formally, or through a country group, for discussion, no further action was taken. It was noted that further discussion on the use of warfarin had been deferred until after a decision by Europe. This was expected in late 2003/early 2004.

Grey Squirrel Control

The England Squirrel Forum is assisting in the development of a grey squirrel control policy for England.

Development issues

The UKRSG noted issues of squirrels and development. It suggested that the lack of guidance on this matter should be drawn to the attention of the Scottish Executive. AM suggested that the appropriate route for this would be through LBAP Steering Groups and Biodiversity Officers on the Local Councils. MC noted the difficulties of producing advice for mitigation without the scientific evidence underpinning the details. SO suggested that there would be common issues and it would be worth collating the experience and evidence of the group to provide a basis to identifying the problems. This was agreed generally.

AP5: All to copy information on development problems in their area to MC for compilation and circulation before next meeting.

4. Scottish Squirrel Strategy

The Group discussed the draft text in detail and identified points for amendment. ZS was requested to make the changes and copy the text to Secretariat for circulation to the UKRSG.

AP6: ZS to amend draft Strategy and copy to MC

Methods of publication and publicity were discussed. It was suggested that the document should be launched to co-incide with the squirrel colloquium in May. MC offered to investigate publication through SNH. It was also suggested that the document should be placed on the internet for easy access. MC offered to investigate the use of the SNH website which could be linked to by other organisations.

AP7: MC to investigate publication of the Strategy (style and funding).

AP8: MC to investigate development of Press Statement by SNH (for use by local groups also)

AP9: AM to put Strategy on the agenda for next UKRSG. Copies to be supplied.

ZS and SO were thanked by the Group for their work in collating and editing the Strategy to such a high standard.

5. Local squirrel group issues

AM noted comments from members that the last meeting of the SSG had been disappointing in not devoting sufficient time to discuss local group issues. It was agreed that this was a fundamental function of the group and that recent issues, such as the strategy, had dominated discussions. SO proposed that it would be useful to identify practical issues which usually get lost in the meeting, for example survey,

monitoring, etc. AM proposed that a slot should be maintained at every second meeting to devote time to discussing these issues. It was suggested that this could be aided if representatives of local groups could supply a note of progress for each meeting around a month prior to the meeting, including highlighting problems which had been noted or had arisen. This could be circulated with the agenda and relevant issues discussed.

AP10: Local Squirrel group representatives to provide an update on local group progress, including identification of specific problems, 4 weeks before each meeting.

SO told the Group that she is leaving the RSSS project to a post in Forest Enterprise. As a consequence, ZS was identified to receive and collate information for discussion under local group issues at next meeting.

AP11: MC to circulate progress reports with agenda and forward list of local squirrel group issues to ZS for identification of specific issues to discuss.

6 Contracts update

MC reported that the Priority Woodlands work raised at the previous meeting was currently going through the Procurement process in SNH and a contract due to be awarded shortly. This would be a two-stage project, covering approximately 6 months work. As the contract had not been issued, limited details could be discussed at the meeting.

The application for the Scottish Squirrel Officer funding had been deferred a year. However, it was expected that it would be forwarded for funding in 2004. In addition, SNH were approached by HLF for guidance about expanding their projects into species-based work. Consequently it was suggested that an application may be made to them before the end of 2004 to obtain funding for the Scottish Officer. This possibility would be discussed within SNH shortly.

7. Any other business

Grey squirrel control paper

SB noted that he had produced the paper circulated by AW as a discussion document. JF added that this had the backing of the FTA but didn't represent FTA policy, although they were committed to a policy of grey squirrel control this year. SB requested comments on the document – positive or negative – in order to shape the progress of the FTA policy. AM suggested that SB/FTA should refer back to the correspondence from Steve Gregory (FC) from 1996/97 for FC input to the paper.

Squirrel Colloquium

SB requested a reminder of the Colloquium in May. This will be held at Ford Castle, Northumberland on 26-30 May. The main organiser/contact point for this is Peter Lurz at Newcastle University.

Squirrel paper

SB drew the attention of the group to a paper by Peter Lurz and recommended reading. Lurz, *et al* in *Forestry*, Vol: 76(1): pp95-108.

ZS also noted a study by Stirling University on parapox research.

AP12: ZS to pass on information on parapox research at Stirling University

8 Date of next meeting

Friday 3 October 2003 – SNH Battleby

Annex 1: Updates from local groups

Dumfries and Galloway

1. Work in Priority Woodlands (PW)

I am now meeting with owners and managers of PW throughout the region to discuss the PW assessment, recommended management for red squirrels and potential spring/summer hair-tube survey sites.

I continue to monitor the FC Register of New Planting and Felling Proposals for applications, which affect Priority Woodlands, and provide input and comments to scoping meetings, Forest Plans and Forest Design Plans associated with PW.

2. Grey squirrels on the increase

Grey squirrel sightings are on the increase in Dumfries & Galloway. They seem to be utilising the river corridors to move southwards into the region as well as moving up from Northern England. All sightings are followed up with advice, and where appropriate, traps, Parapox testing kits and training have been provided to landowners/ Gamekeepers.

Regular press releases encourage the public to report sightings. Letters have also been sent out to members of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association and Scottish Landowners Federation. Emails and letters have also been sent out to all wardens, rangers and conservation groups throughout D&G to raise awareness to grey squirrels and parapox in the region and to promote our trap loan scheme.

I recently drafted a 'Parapox protocol' to be followed should an outbreak occur in the region. A file containing letters, draft press releases, a poster, a questionnaire and contact lists will be compiled which will be ready to roll if the disease is detected. Regional newspaper editors have pledged their support for an on-going awareness raising campaign.

3. Red squirrel warning road signs

Red squirrel road warning signs are now installed at five 'black spot' sites. A monitoring scheme has been set up at all sites in order to determine how effective the signs are in reducing red squirrel road kills. Records over the next year will be compared to those prior to the installment of the signs. However, as discussed in a previous SSG meeting, this monitoring may not give accurate results as casualties may move from the roadside or are removed by taxidermists. We may have to rely on anecdotal evidence also.

4. New red squirrel trail installed

An interpretive trail is now in place in Dalbeattie Forest. The trail follows an existing forest walk with many beautifully illustrated interpretation posts as well as a magnification post and a wind up audio post, which plays a variety of squirrel and bird calls (first of it's kind in the UK!). It is anticipated that the trail will be used for future guided walks and by local school as well as visitors to the area. This project was funded by Forest Enterprise and the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme.

5. Red squirrels and green tourism

A new leaflet has been designed and printed with funding from SNH which is geared towards visitors to D&G interested in seeing red squirrels in the wild and learning more about them. The leaflets will also be distributed through a variety of outlets, including Tourist Information Centres. The leaflet will also be used in a trial project whereby a combined leaflet holder/donation box will be placed in 10 B&B's with red

squirrels nearby. This will raise visitor awareness to the RSSS project and where to see red squirrels as well as raising funds for our on-going work.

6. *Education and awareness*

Ongoing programme of illustrated talks, guided walks, educational workshops and local schools, regular press/radio coverage and production of 'Red Bush Telegraph'.

Advice provided to several students (Aberdeen, Bangor, Dundee and Glasgow Universities) for honours projects on various aspects of red squirrel conservation.

Ayrshire

- Constitution drafted according to advice from IR with regard to achieving charity status.
- Charity status confirmed in February 2003. Scottish charity number SC033978.
- Through advice from the Council for Voluntary Organisations we have applied for a grant from Awards for All to cover admin. costs, merchandise purchase, survey equipment, display/interpretative materials etc.
- Web-site feedback has been positive and it seems to be well used. The "News" section is constantly being updated and we hope to have detailed maps online soon. Survey information will also be added soon.
www.e-ayrshire.co.uk/local/redsquirrel
- Leaflet and survey information sheets in production.
- A total of 3 guided walks and 5 illustrated talks have taken place. A total of around 200 people have attended these events. A summer programme of walks and talks is planned.
- Following receipt of the FC maps of Ayrshire woods a push has been made to promote surveying. The uptake from the public has been slow but is ever growing. There is much more interest in recording casual observations than in formal survey work. Getting volunteers to do your surveying requires good promotion and excellent co-ordination!
- Hair tube transects are being established.
- Attempts are being made to contact all estates and individuals who are engaged in grey control. Many are reluctant to record any data but there have been offers to carry out parapox tests.
- Regular meetings being held with landowners, foresters, local conservation groups and Squirrels in South Scotland Project.
- A Newsletter has been published which contained information on joining the group. The response, again, has been slow but gradual.