

Wales Squirrel Partnership (2) **18th July 2006**

Present

Martin Bailey	Wildlife Services
Kate Burgess	Denbighshire County Council
Michelle Bromley	Forestry Commission Wales (FCW)
Richard Carrick	Forestry Commission Wales (FCW)
Sarah Cartmel	MWRSP
Huw Denman	European Squirrel Initiative/MWRSP
Emma Durward	Powys County Council
Liz Halliwell	Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)
Ben Isaac	Welsh Assembly Government
Hugh Knott	Menter Mon/ARSP
Isabel Macho	Carmarthenshire County Council
Diane Morgan	Brecknock Wildlife Trust/MWRSP
Neil Matthew	Countryside Council for Wales
Dawn Parry	Countryside Council for Wales
Richard Pow	Regional Development Officer, FC England
Dai Rees	Forestry Commission Wales
Craig Shuttleworth	Menter Mon/ARSP
Kate Williamson	Snowdonia National Park
Chris Wynne	North Wales Wildlife Trust

Chair	Liz Halliwell;
Minutes	Michelle Bromley

1. Apologies

Stuart Gray, Iolo Lloyd (FCW), Brenda Mayle (Forest Research), Iwan Parry, Nick Jackson (Welsh Mountain Zoo), Geoff Liles, James Laing (Forestry Commission Wales), Jessa Battersby (JNCC), Raj Jones (Friends of Anglesey Red Squirrels), Patrick Green (Forestry Commission Wales), Judith Webb (FTA)

2. Introductions and purpose of the day

LH welcomed the group and introduced Richard Pow from FC England as guest speaker and explained that today's meeting would focus on discussing the pro's and con's of a Wales Red Squirrel project.

3. Summary of red squirrel projects in Wales

Anglesey

(HK & CS) The project has confirmed funding of £440K over 4 years. Aiming for total eradication of greys. Newborough reintroduction programme restocking with new captive bred reds as squirrels in pens had died from a virus (not SPV). DNA study has confirmed some European and UK stock. Monitoring has shown reds occupied new areas in Newborough. Numbers of reds at Pentraeth have returned to 2002 following a low in last two years.

Clocaenog

(RC & SC) Forest Design Plan completed in 2004 with robust RS population as main objective. Over 2000 ha comprise a Low Impact Silvicultural System (LISS) trial site (management by methods other than clearfell). Cone crops are being monitored. With higher GS presence (good food years) there was limited GS control targeting corridors. There appear to be widespread movement of GS with evidence that some are remaining in the forest. Identified new areas with RS.

Mid-Wales

(IM & HD) Further Species Challenge Fund project allowed additional survey for RS. New site identified in North Tywi, but also significant GS penetration into the conifer forest in this area (some GS were 9km from the nearest broadleaf). Analysis of samples from culled GS revealed 50-60% SPV in the first phase of the project and 90% SPV in the second. Genetic typing has revealed haplotypes similar to Anglesey, Clocaenog and 2 unique to mid-Wales. Advice is being sought on the way forward, perhaps as a PhD project, though there was limited capacity to manage such a project.

(HD) Isolated block west of Tywi surrounded by broadleaves. Sighting of RS in 1999. Been trapping (GS control) for last 5 years with 11 RS trapped so far in 2006. No SPV testing. CCW has funded GS trapping in Allt Rhyd y Groes NNR.

Cynwyd

(SC & CW) A 400ha well linked woodland with regular sightings. Species Challenge Funding for hair tube presence/absence of RS. Will have map in early August. Forest Design Plan is mainly LISS and just approved. Consists of spruce, fir, larch mixture with future species introducing pine.

Cwm Mynach

(KW) Hair tube assessment for RS in 2002 found only evidence of GS. However, reports of recent sightings of red squirrels have been received.

General points

- (SC) Aberystwyth University are developing a new test on GS to investigate how SPV infectious they are. Could transmission of SPV be on contact or a genetic disposition?
- Other unverified sighting discussed including Gwydyr, Brecafa, Aberhirnant etc.

4. Learning the lessons from Red Alert North England

Richard Pow (Regional Development Officer of North East England Conservancy)

Richard Pow came to share his experiences of the *Save Our Squirrels* project. Run by the Red Alert North England partnership, it has £626k HLF funding accompanied by RES (Rural Enterprise Scheme) and FC grant support (Woodland Improvement Grants), volunteer time and other funding sources

with a total project cost of £1.1M. Funding is targeted to 16 priority sites identified using agreed site selection criteria.

Key principles to the success of the project were:

- building consensus through an inclusive process and good communication
- building a relationship with key potential funders (may take up to 2 years)
- securing a core team that are highly committed.

The bulk of bid preparation and submission for the North England project was undertaken by Northumberland Wildlife Trust (and Cumbria WT) with FC and EN providing a leadership, co-ordination and management role (eg. 25% Richard Pow's time over a 3 year period). This inclusive approach focussed the actions of the disparate squirrel projects.

A team of 6.5 people will be recruited to the project and the team are tasked with determining and sourcing funds for maintenance of the project objectives beyond 3-year core funding period. A large proportion of funds are outlined for 'people and wildlife' rather than grey squirrel control and habitat management. Each of the 16 core areas (with 5km buffer zone) has a voluntary project group and champion. *Save Our Squirrels* project area has 80% public support for grey squirrel control to save the red.

RP emphasised the importance of having a carefully worked out and broadly supported strategy based on sound science. The project has won wide support from land managers, interest groups and the public commanding significant positive press coverage and spin-off's for rural tourism.

5. Partnership discussion

There were many questions and a general discussion on the value and application of a Wales red squirrel project and the associated benefits and risks.

Spatial planning for reserves and buffer zones:

Operations Note 010a: Management guidelines for Red squirrel reserves in northern England (PDF 68kb) [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/ewgs-on010a-rsq-reserve.pdf/\\$FILE/ewgs-on010a-rsq-reserve.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/ewgs-on010a-rsq-reserve.pdf/$FILE/ewgs-on010a-rsq-reserve.pdf)

Operations Note 010b: Management guidelines for Red squirrel reserve buffer zones in northern England (PDF 60kb) [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/ewgs-on010b-rsq-buffer.pdf/\\$FILE/ewgs-on010b-rsq-buffer.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/ewgs-on010b-rsq-buffer.pdf/$FILE/ewgs-on010b-rsq-buffer.pdf)

Determining management priority between priority species (eg Red Squirrel) and priority habitat (eg native woodland) could be a potential conflict of interests. RP said that this was an important principle to be shared with stakeholders.

Identification of a leadership group or individual was important. Could WSF do this?

It would be important to identify clear objectives of such a project. What were the likely sources of funding given that competition for single species projects is fierce (eg Black Grouse)?

Is community support for a RS Project high in places other than Anglesey? Much groundwork would be needed to ensure significant community support was in place. It was suggested that RS project should be raised to the Minister's sights to increase political appetite.

Risks discussed included raising community and political expectation beyond that which could be delivered or sustained in the long term; and investment of significant effort and resources but for the bid to fail.

What could be achieved without a Wales red squirrel project and what would be the added benefit of the project?

There was a general discussion on clearfelling (CF) as a risk to RS populations due to the importance of connectivity. It was acknowledged that CF could help isolate SPV, that CFs could be designed to maintain connectivity of RS populations and that size of CF was important especially in smaller forest blocks.

6. Next Steps

Task and Finish Group to progress the draft of the RS Conservation Plan.

Partnership members to informally discuss the practicalities and ways forward for a funded project plan.

Identification of funding for a scoping project to assess the practicalities and development of a Wales red squirrel project.

Development of community (or 'Friends') groups for each of the local projects.

7. Report from Wales Squirrel Forum

- *Wales Red Squirrel Conservation Plan*

LH presented the rough draft which is not for wider circulation at this point and summarised the WSF discussion.

- Identification of priority sites was a big issue and agreed that the use of the word 'priority' should be replaced by 'focal area'.
- There were a number of specific points made on the draft including SPV understanding and funding; how the Plan would fit with current Government Policy; 'smartening' advisory, communication and research with more inclusive communication mediums, better linking to existing guidance sources and disseminating to wider audiences.
- It was thought that the distinction between the Plan and implementation required more discussion.

- *Focal Areas*

LH summarised the WSF discussion that all verified red populations should be focal areas because in Wales the sites are so few. Robust rationale and

criteria need to be developed to define 'focal area' including activity level, population viability and dynamics, scale/spatial issues, strategic spread. Require ability to review focal areas with new evidence (ie. adding new verified populations and removing proven absences). The Partnership indicated that a key question was how to deal with 'peripheral' sites. There was some discussion on what constituted a verified record and the validation process.

- *Warfarin review*

LH explained that the FC guidance for use of warfarin and accompanying map was produced in 1974 and required update to remove odd distribution based on counties and in light of the new Control of Pesticides Regulations (COPR). MB explained that FC GB was currently seeking legal advice on the update procedure re: PSD as competent authority. The Guidance and Map update would be done with Country advice and consultation but would be co-ordinated by FC GB.

The new COPR required the use of selective access hoppers everywhere. The Forum had discussed the need for buffer zones and the definition of criteria for woodland suitability for reds. Connected to this issue was discussion of a central repository for recording sightings, procedure for verification of presence and absence of reds and increasing awareness.

8. FCW Grey Squirrel Policy

MB quickly outlined the progress to date. Members of the Wales Squirrel Forum had provided expert advice:

- Advising on the objectives and helping to define the outcomes of a FC Wales squirrel policy
- Consideration of the FC England Policy Statement and assessing its applicability to Wales
- Suggesting and advising on country level variations, specifics and/or new policy options for Wales
- Consideration of the 'critical threat' assessment guidance in England's policy statement, providing advice on spatial implications in Wales

There would be additional consultation with stakeholders through the Wales Squirrel Partnership, Woodland Strategy Advisory Panel and the wider Woodland Partnership.

9. Any other business

None.

10. Date of next meeting

To be agreed.

Michelle Bromley
4th October 2006