

Ayrshire
Red squirrel
group



Autumn Newsletter November 2007



We hope you enjoy the second edition of our newsletter. If there's anything you'd like to see included or if you've got something of interest for the next issue, we'll be really pleased to receive it. Please contact Shona, details below.

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Ayrshire Red Squirrel Rescue Project

Since the last newsletter in July, things have been pretty busy. In a nutshell, I work has included surveying areas of Carsphairn, Galloway and Glen App for squirrel presence accompanied by some volunteers from Auchincruive College. We've had 3 guided walks at Craigengillan and Culzean Castle and done 2 talks to Opportunities in Retirement and North Ayrshire's RSPB. I've also spoken to the Kelburn Young Rangers Club and a Special Needs group in Girvan. There's now a "Feeding Squirrels" Info page which is available on the website. We're still on an "Up the Squirrel Sightings" campaign and you might see our posters round various Ayrshire libraries as well as shops, pubs and notice boards throughout Ayrshire, in particular in locations south of Maybole. We've purchased some table top display panels and we're going to be producing a display on Red Squirrel Conservation in Ayrshire which will rotate round the various libraries.

There's a Red Squirrel Adoption Pack which will soon be available both to individuals and to schools. This has been produced by one of our members, Sian Williams who's put a load of work into its creation.

Education Pack Launch

On Thursday 15th November the Ayrshire Red Squirrel Group launched their Education Pack. This was a busy morning held at Coylton Primary School with Provost Sloan, and Councillors Connolly, Low and Davies attending as well as committee members, Dolphin House and several teachers from the school. Members of the Press were also in attendance so hopefully you'll have seen a selection of smiling, happy faces in your local newspapers very soon.

This education pack is the culmination of a lot of time and hard work and will be sent to all 143 primary schools in South, East and North Ayrshire. The pack contains a wide range of activities for all ages and is especially important as it uses a local species, our native red squirrel, to look at conservation issues. The pack is available in hard copy and as a CD – this includes some lovely footage of over 6 red squirrels taken in a garden in Kilkerran, South Ayrshire. The footage was shot prior to 2000 and sadly there are now few red



squirrels left at Kilkerran.

We are keen that schools make maximum use of the pack and Shona can help them by providing talks to schools and additional information.



Sightings and Surveys

We continue to get squirrel sightings both from the website sightings page as well as through word of mouth at events and open days. Remember that we're also interested in grey squirrel sightings especially if you're seeing them where they never used to be. We've had a few more red squirrel sightings here at Auchincruive as well as positive sightings in Alloway which is very encouraging. Please continue to send in your various sightings via email, sightings page on website, post or by telephone. Everything's very gratefully received.

Comings and Goings and other Happenings

It is with real regret that we say goodbye to Ann-Marie Mac Masters who was the

Red Squirrel Officer for Dumfries and Galloway. Ann-Marie and partner Ruadriah have headed for New Zealand to seek adventure and warmer climes.

Hot news – Red Squirrel Strongholds

On a brighter note, we welcome Ayrshire's own Sian Williams to the new post of **Red Squirrel Stronghold Officer**. Sian has been and is still a very dedicated and enthusiastic Ayrshire Red Squirrel Group supporter having undertaken a number of projects on ARSG's behalf. This post seeks to establish a number of red only sites which can be protected from the onslaught of the non native greys. These sites can be on both private and public land and will use existing measures of grants, planting and woodland management to give red squirrels the best chance of thriving.

We wish Sian all the very best in this important and enterprising role.

The Ayrshire Red Squirrel Group had an enjoyable **Members' Night** on Thurs 22nd November. This was held at Auchincruive and the subject was "Squirrels of the World" which was led by our own Sian Williams. Sian gave a fascinating talk on the various sizes, shapes, adaptations and foodstuffs of the many different squirrels found around the world, and boy are there some strange ones!



Grey Squirrels. It's the Law – or is it?

The Wildlife and Countryside Act quite clearly states the position of captured grey squirrels as the story below indicates.

Gardener facing prosecution - for releasing squirrels into the wood.

(Daily Mail 9th June 2006)

When grey squirrels began preying on birds nesting in his garden, Roy Hill thought he had the humane solution. (He) set up a cage, captured the troublesome pests then released them into the wild.

(He) was astonished to receive a visit from an RSPCA inspector who he said *scolded him for breaking the law and threatened to haul him into court.*

He was even more outraged to learn that, thanks to a bizarre quirk in the law, he would not be in any bother at all if he had simply shot the squirrels dead, rather than letting them go. Mr Hill said yesterday: "I couldn't believe what I was hearing. What is this country coming to? It simply defies belief that I could have got into trouble for putting the squirrels back into the wild."

The RSPCA spokeswoman said it was not illegal to catch grey squirrels but that it was illegal to release them into the wild. She said: 'It is against the Wildlife and Country Act 1981 to release non-native species into the wild because there are problems they may cause to British wildlife such as red squirrels. **Even the RSPCA could not re-release a grey squirrel.**

"So unless it was sick or injured we would not catch it and if we did, under the law, we would have to kill it. It would have been legal to kill the squirrel if they had done so humanely."

The RSPCA spokeswoman said the best advice she could give the couple was to deter the squirrels in the first place by not putting food out.

"The couple could have been prosecuted by the RSPCA or other agencies," she warned. If convicted the couple could have been fined an unlimited amount.



*And yet....*A grey squirrel had to be rescued from a bird feeder as it had gorged on so many nuts it could not squeeze back out. Insp Graham Hammond said that the squirrel had "eyes bigger than its stomach" and had lost its figure while feasting in the wire-frame last week. He said it was "*quite an unusual rescue*". Inspector Hammond said he managed to widen the gaps between two of the bars with the aid of a crow-bar and a grasper **to release the squirrel**, which was not hurt.

Surely the Inspector was breaking the law by releasing it? (SM)

see www.rivercottage.net for some interesting discussion on this one.

Government Agency Backs. Release of Grey Squirrels

This is a worrying article which I found in a September issue of "The Shooting Times. Natural England will grant licenses in certain circumstances, allowing the release of some non native species.Rehabbed greys can now be released in 'acceptable areas' (ie where there are no red squirrels). As the European Squirrel Initiative states, grey squirrels do not only devastate the populations of our native red squirrels

but also damage trees and raid birds' nests. "Nowhere is safe from them".

The World Conservation Union includes grey squirrels as one of the top 100 alien species. NE have stated that a license will only be issued if the grey is released within 1 km of where it was found in an area which will definitely not have an impact on red squirrel populations. Eg Hyde Park in London.

Last year 8 separate licenses were issued to RSPCA offices around the country.

Don't know about you folks, but I feel this is giving really mixed messages to the public who don't fully understand biodiversity and the argument of native and naturalized species.

Other Squirrel Groups' News



The endangered red squirrel population of Anglesey's Newborough Forest is facing a new killer virus, experts say.

One animal is known to have died of a deadly adenovirus, the first documented case in Wales. Two others are thought likely to be diagnosed with the virus. Conservationists say it is a "worrying development" in work to protect the island's squirrel population of 200. Earlier this year, the reds faced an outbreak of "squirrel pox", carried by grey squirrels, but it was averted. Scientists hope to use the same techniques - washing the nest boxes with an antiviral disinfectant - to head off the spread of the latest threat, which causes fatal diarrhoea in infected animals.

Dr Craig Shuttleworth, woodland ecologist at Menter Môn, which runs the Anglesey red squirrel project, said seven cases of red squirrel adenovirus have previously been recorded in Britain, all in North West England. He said the symptoms - typically unusual lesions and diarrhoea - were hard to confirm as the squirrels' intestines began to decompose within three hours and their bodies were unlikely to be found in time for tests to work. The animal which tested positive had one of the highest viral counts ever observed in a red squirrel, said Dr Shuttleworth, and it was likely that other wild red squirrels would have been exposed to the virus. He said scientists were becoming increasingly concerned about the possibility that the virus may have caused severe declines in red squirrel populations in previous years "At the moment we have no evidence of an island-wide disease epidemic."

The Tail-End

Tourists on board a pleasure boat in the Lake District could not believe their eyes when they spotted a red squirrel in the middle of Ullswater. The mammals can swim, but they find it very strenuous, and have been known to drown in water troughs. But this determined squirrel had swum 300 yards (274m) - or about the length of six swimming pools - from the shore. Passengers lowered a rope to the mammal and it climbed on board and hitched a lift back to shore.



Robert Benson, chairman of the Penrith and District Red Squirrel Group, said: "I've been involved with the conservation of red squirrels for 15 years and I know they can swim, but I have never seen it. "This squirrel was swimming strongly and had its tail coiled on its back so it didn't look bedraggled or as if it was struggling. I've never seen anything like it before." Once ashore the squirrel ran along a fence and disappeared, apparently none the worse for its dip.

- The endangered red squirrel has been spotted in Bembridge on the Isle of Wight for the first time.
- Squirrels can eat a variety of poisonous plants and mushrooms (like amanitas) without getting sick.
- A company which makes guns (Webley) has donated a pistol to red squirrel

defender, Ashley Boon who controls greys in and around Geltdale, Cumbria. (Sporting Shooter, Sept 07)

- "Anyone for Squirrel?-"
A restaurant in Cumbria is offering diners free squirrel pancakes after a cull. The Famous Wild Boar Hotel near Windermere is offering grey squirrels cooked Peeking-duck style.
- Red Squirrels have a sweet tooth. They may bite into the bark of trees to start sap flowing, and then wait till the water evaporates leaving a sweetish substance. Sugar content goes up as the tree dries
- In the original folktale, Cinderella's slippers were made of squirrel fur, but a mistaken translation turned them to glass. A camel's hair brush is really made out of squirrel fur.

How you can help the Ayrshire Red Squirrel Group

The Ayrshire Red Squirrel Group is a voluntary group working on behalf of Ayrshire's red squirrel population. There are many roles that volunteers play and we are grateful for sightings of squirrels, both red and grey, in particular where grey squirrels are only just being found. If you can help in any way, please have a look at our website or contact Shona.

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