

BETTER RED THAN DEAD...

Help save our squirrels

Words: Chris Breen



Photography by Bill Perry, Great Clifton

RED squirrel campaigners in Allerdale are looking for volunteers in the ongoing fight to help save the Lake District's iconic animal from extinction.

Old Brown, the owl in the Beatrix Potter stories which brought Squirrel Nutkin to fame is no longer a great threat to red squirrels, it is the disease carried by the invading grey squirrel. The Lakes and West Cumbria are now one of the last strongholds of Squirrel Nutkin and his friends.

The latest move to help co-ordinate the battle is the formation of the Red Squirrels Northern England - a five-year partnership project between RSST, the Forestry Commission, Natural England and the Wildlife Trusts - which was launched, recently, at Hutton-in-the-Forest, by HRH The Prince of Wales. The project aims to co-ordinate red squirrel conservation work right across Cumbria and Northumberland, as well as some parts of Lancashire, Co. Durham and Yorkshire.

There are already 1,500 volunteers involved in red squirrel conservation projects across northern England and Prince Charles praised them, saying: "Reds are returning to the woodlands and gardens where they were once terrorised by the greys. My dream is that red squirrels might thrive throughout the United Kingdom and it's here that perhaps we could start to think that might be a reality, thanks to people like yourselves.

He was given a copy of Squirrels Pantry Tea Room & Friends' Recipe Book, a book that's available to buy from Squirrels Pantry, Oakhurst, Cockermouth, with all proceeds going to the Allerdale Red Squirrel Group. So far it has raised over £3,000. Recipes are from customers & red squirrel volunteers.

Volunteers will be taking a central role in the new project; contributing essential skills, local knowledge, and ensuring strong community participation and you can help. Locally many more helpers are needed and if you want to put yourself forward telephone Jo Kirkbride (on 07730 0191812) or Sue Southworth 07817334309.

Breeding season for the squirrels is January - March and again later in the year, July - September. Their gestation period is 38 - 39 days, and you may see baby reds about once they are 40 - 45 days old

Reds usually have three or four young which are called kittens.



Red Squirrels photographed in Great Clifton



Photography by Sarah McNeil, Penrith

Above left to right: Jo Kirkbride (Allerdale Red Squirrel Group), Sally Hardy (Ponteland Red Squirrel Group), Jackie Foott (Sedbergh Red Squirrel Group), talk to HRH, the Prince of Wales at the launch of umbrella group, Northern Red Squirrels.