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SQUIRREL

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Relentless!



ESI is a widely supported charity set up 14 years ago. It consists of mainly voluntary expertise from land managers, forest managers, conservationists, researchers and academics. ESI is very well placed to tackle the grey squirrel challenge, as our costs are low but our expertise is high. We are the only charitable organisation in Britain working with the issue of grey squirrel management on a large scale and working with others to do the same.

ESI can be rightfully proud of its increasing profile and influence – doubly so when we take into account that we achieve so much without the huge staff structures and associated costs that we see within some organisations. This is because we rely heavily on the expertise of our trustees and other key supporters who volunteer their time and energy to our campaign. However, it is impossible to avoid some costs and in order for us to continue to lobby governments, to inform and advise a widening set of audiences, then we must find the funds to cover basic costs such as printing this magazine, our other publications, postage, travel

expenses and, of course, fund our research budget.

Every year, we need to raise in the region of £30,000. If we could raise more, our voice could be even louder and we could commission more research. I hope that readers of this edition of *Squirrel* will forgive a quite blatant plea for financial support. (See our overview on grey squirrel damage on page 3 as a reminder of why we need to remove this pest.)

Our “fighting fund” needs your help – if you are able to help, then I can assure you that your generosity will be put to the very best possible



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use. I urge you to make use of the donation form on the back cover, or if you would like to give regularly, please contact us by email to set up a standing order.

Andy Wiseman
ESI Chairman

In Brief...

Fattening Up!

It is being widely reported that grey squirrels are fatter than usual this year, due to the exceptionally mild autumn and winter. Photos of super fat greys have appeared on social media and the story has even been covered in national newspapers. Grey squirrels do not hibernate during winter. The milder temperatures, well above average across the UK this winter, mean that less energy is needed by the greys to keep warm. Perhaps the extra fat makes them easier targets?



Jigger Writes...

The Fen Trap

The Fen trap is under threat from the EU, possibly to be banned for the catching of stoats.

On the Estate where I work as a squirrel trapper, we run a trapping line over 40 km long, sometimes with hundreds of traps, for 51 weeks of the year. I rely on the fen, which is the most effective trap for the job. Even if I set it beside another trap, the squirrel will go into the Fen, which I place in portable wooden tunnels. As I travel on a quad along the woodland rides, the traps are

checked with a sideways glance. They are cheap to buy and take five seconds to re-set. If banned, I think it will be a harder job for me to try and be efficient.

EU, please don't take our Fen traps away.



Jigger Mallett

Vermin controller at a Suffolk estate

ESI Activity

In the last edition of *Squirrel* we ran a front cover which suggested that the Forestry Commission was perhaps not doing its stuff in dealing with the problem grey squirrels on its Estate. Since then, ESI has continued interrogating the Forestry Commission over its policy.

We have been greatly assisted in this by the Lord Inglewood who so far has asked four parliamentary questions trying to drill down into the stance of the Forestry Commission. We want to establish why it is that they, unlike virtually any other public or private sector landowner, will not allow the shooting of grey squirrels on their land.

It has been quite a game of "cat and mouse" with the Forestry Commission, in our opinion, failing to answer straight questions with straight answers.

The first question was centred on the Forestry Commission's refusal to allow the use of air rifles by experienced, trained and insured volunteers as part of an integrated programme for grey squirrel control. The Commission replied that the Forestry Commission considered that shooting had limited effectiveness in controlling grey squirrel populations and that as the majority of forest areas had public access there was an issue of public safety.

This answer typified the approach taken by the Commission, which not only flies in the face of evidence, but also indicates how unnecessarily risk adverse they are.

More questions have been asked and, thanks to the Lord Inglewood, will continue to be asked, to ascertain from the Commission what their real reasons for not allowing strictly

controlled shooting on their land really are.

ESI has been active through the media, issuing press releases welcoming work carried out by BASC in addressing landscape control of grey squirrels through shooting, which is in sharp contrast to the approach taken by the Forestry Commission.

Since the last newsletter, ESI has also met with a number of companies involved in developing new traps and baits, and there have been further discussions on the subject of immuno-contraception for grey squirrels.

ESI continues to support initiatives in Italy and, as has been reported elsewhere in the newsletter, is providing financial support to a research project in Northern Italy.

It is also encouraging to note the grey squirrels are likely to be included in the list of "Union Concern" published by the European Union in the next few weeks. This is the result of hard work carried out by the ESI, the British Government and other bodies.

Finally, preparations are being made for ESI's next major event, a symposium on the pine marten – Saint or Sinner? This will take place in June this year with the aim of exploring whether the pine marten could be an effective part of the solution to dealing with grey squirrels.



Andrew Kendall has been involved with ESI since its founding in 2002, and is responsible for the day to day operation of the charity.

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EU Regulation on Invasive Alien Species

The EU's first regulation on the prevention and management of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species (IAS) (Regulation 1143/2014) came into force on 1 January 2015.

"This Regulation," says the EU, "seeks to address the problem of invasive alien species in a comprehensive manner so as to protect native biodiversity and ecosystem services, as well as to minimize and mitigate the human health or economic impacts that these species can have. The Regulation foresees three types of interventions; prevention, early detection and rapid eradication, and management."

Of greatest interest to supporters of ESI will be the **List of invasive alien species of Union concern**. ESI expects the 'black list' to include the grey squirrel but we will not know for sure until it is published, which should be during April 2016.

Regulation of IAS is Target 5 of *The EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020* – part of a wider plan to halt the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the whole of the EU and help stop global biodiversity loss by 2020.



The Grey Menace

By Andy Wiseman, ESI Chairman

As Spring approaches and we enter into another season of grey squirrel damage after a relatively mild winter, I felt that a reminder of why we want to rid ourselves of the grey squirrel might be timely.

Economic

- It is estimated that grey squirrel bark stripping damage costs the UK timber industry some £14 million per annum. Trees planted using grant funding are being destroyed by grey squirrels at an additional cost to the UK taxpayer.
- Tree species which are growing vigorously with rich phloem vessels in the bark are most vulnerable between the ages of 10 and 40 years.
- Beech, sycamore, oak, poplar, sweet chestnut, birch and cricket bat willow are the most susceptible to damage. Within the UK it is difficult to recommend the planting of beech and sycamore without good grey squirrel control.
- Back in 2000, a survey by the Forestry Commission of vulnerable woodlands in Great Britain estimated that 100% of sycamore, 66% of beech, 30% of oak, ash and sweet chestnut stands had been damaged by grey squirrels. We are still suffering damage and need to keep working on landscape-scale control strategies.
- A few tree species including cherry and ash are not damaged by grey squirrels. Unfortunately, ash is threatened by Chalara fraxinea (ash dieback) disease which removes a species not vulnerable to grey squirrel attack.

Environment

- In time, susceptible tree species such as beech, poplar, sweet chestnut and oak may be lost from the mature woodland canopy; with a corresponding loss of associated fungi, invertebrates and their predators.
- Grey squirrels eat song-bird chicks and eggs. Research carried out by the Game Conservancy and Wildlife Trust demonstrates that grey squirrels have an adverse impact on many native woodland birds, reducing fledging rates by an average of 15%.
- Grey squirrels can damage maize and fruit crops. They are a threat to orchards and market gardens. They destroy bulbs and corms, eat tree nuts, recently sown seeds and enter into roof voids, damaging thatched and shingled roofs, telephone wires and electricity cables.
- Grey squirrels have driven the native red squirrel to localised extinctions by out-competing the red squirrel for food and habitat and by carrying a lethal squirrel pox virus, to which it is immune but which is deadly to the native red squirrel.

This is why we work so hard to control grey squirrels and why ESI is continuing to promote landscape-scale control of this highly destructive invasive alien species.



Forestry Commission Grey Squirrel Control “Lamentable”, Says ESI

The Forestry Commission’s current approach to grey squirrel control is lamentable. All landowners and land managers have an obligation to control grey squirrels and the example set by parts of the Forestry Commission is poor and falls below that of private sector owners and other NGOs.

“It is ironic that the organisation charged with looking after our national forest estate falls way behind others in the control of grey squirrels,” said Andy Wiseman of ESI.

The Forestry Commission currently does not allow the shooting of grey squirrels on some of its land. Shooting is a proven method of control and one which research shows, when coupled with other methods, achieves the best results. What’s more, ESI is not proposing an unregulated free-for-all! Shooting would only be undertaken by trained and fully insured volunteers whose work would be closely monitored and regulated.

“The Forestry Commission should be leading by example to help control grey squirrels. The only way we can reduce grey squirrel numbers is by working together on a landscape scale in

a coordinated way and the Forestry Commission is not taking a team approach,” added Mr Wiseman.

ESI, along with a number of other organisations, has been calling upon the Forestry Commission to approach grey squirrel control in a more systematic way, to embrace all methods of control and to work with partners, particularly in Cumbria, and to use proven methods of control from elsewhere in the world.

ESI is ramping up the pressure at parliamentary level – the charity is asking a series of parliamentary questions about the no-shooting policy on some Forestry Commission land. ESI hopes that this level of parliamentary scrutiny will force the Forestry Commission to come to its senses and allow the controlled shooting of grey squirrels by trained volunteers across all of its territory.

Grey Squirrel Control Steps Up a Gear in East Scotland

By Ken Neil

The photo of a grey squirrel taken by a hidden camera at a National Trust property between Dundee and Aberdeen has raised the stakes once more in this part of Scotland, writes Ken Neil, Tayside Project Officer for Saving Scotland’s Red Squirrels.

The line of control which aims to keep greys squirrels moving further into Scotland, runs from the north-east coast of Angus down to Argyle. On the east coast the River South Esk and the River North Esk have formed part of that boundary, with only occasional sightings of grey squirrels between the two rivers.

I have been working with two large estates in this area, one of which has recently joined the Scottish Rural Development Programme, to trap grey squirrels, but they appear to be pushing over the river.

The grey squirrel that appeared on the wildlife camera was at a National Trust property, the House of Dun, birthplace of JM Barrie, which sits just north of the River South Esk.

A new officer is taking up his post in April this year. He will be working with the National Trust on a comprehensive trapping programme which we hope will compensate for this current bulge in the population.

Grey squirrels have been migrating through the county of Angus and we will be working our way through it like a military operation. Working with supportive estates through the area known as the Howe of Strathmore, we have done a huge amount of work and so far have managed to head the grey squirrels off at the pass.

We trapped nearly one thousand grey squirrels last year and while not complacent, we hope to make a big enough dent in this larger population to return to normal levels.



Photo courtesy of The National Trust for Scotland

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International News



ESI Funds Research in Italy

ESI has recently approved funding for research on the effects of parasites and stress on native red squirrels by American grey squirrels. The research will be conducted by Dr Lucas Wauters, of Insubria University, Italy and Dr Ben Dantzer of the University of Michigan, USA, and runs from January 2016 to January 2017.

Native red squirrels are threatened by populations of grey squirrels in a number of locations in Italy. It is well known that grey squirrels cause local extinction in reds partly through outcompeting them over limited resources, but this research will focus on two areas of interest – whether the presence of greys causes increased levels of chronic stress in the red squirrel and whether the greys are transmitting parasites to the native species.

Dr Wauters and Dr Dantzer will also look at whether a common parasite of grey squirrels (*Strongyloides robustus*) is linked with increased stress in the native species and whether that in turn increases reds' susceptibility to parasites and disease and reduces their ability to reproduce. The research will follow individual red squirrels, measuring parasites, stress levels, and reproductive output by testing faeces. The cost of these tests which will be supported by ESI and will be run on red squirrels which are in contact with greys before and after removal of the grey to see if chronic stress reduces once greys are removed, and between red squirrels infected and not-infected by the parasites.

"The results of this research will help us understand the complex ways that invasive species like the American grey threaten native biodiversity," says ESI Chairman, Andy Wiseman, "ESI is pleased to be able to support this project, which is the first study of its kind on the link between grey and red squirrels and stress."

Italy Update

By Filippo Gautier

While we wait for final approval of the new EU invasive species regulations, including confirmation that grey and other non-European squirrels are on the black list, grey squirrel control plans in the three regions affected by grey squirrels (Lombardy, Piedmont and Liguria) have been approved.

We are confident that the excellent results achieved through the European LIFE-NAT/IT00095 project, which ended one year ago, will maintain momentum and continue to make a valuable contribution to the conservation of the red squirrel.

Unfortunately, in spite of these successes, the expansion of greys has been reported in the wooded Roero area (Piedmont, some 50 km south-east of Turin) where there is significant, commercial cultivation of hazelnuts. Those involved in grey squirrel control are working with growers' associations to tackle this serious threat to one of the most important crops in the region.

Another great achievement of the three-year LIFE project has been an improvement in communication both with the general public and the press. Worthy of mention is a full-page article which appeared in *La Stampa* national daily newspaper on January 31st this year, which focussed on the invasive (and damaging) grey squirrel presence in the main parks of Turin. A group of these rodents had found a way into a social services building through the roof from a nearby park and had gnawed at the ceiling panels until they had collapsed.

Clear and Present Danger

These photos were taken by Giuseppe Balbiano in his garden in the hills near Turin. The red squirrel is enjoying ripe persimmons. Unfortunately, the grey squirrel was also photographed in the same garden.





UK News



Sefton Coast

In the last issue of the ESI newsletter we reported on a plan to cut down two hundred thousand trees in Alnsdale and Formby. These plans are now on hold after an outcry by those concerned that this would jeopardise a red squirrel refuge in the area.

A report by Mersey Forest had suggested that the trees which grow along the dune slacks along the Sefton Coast, north of Liverpool, might be detrimental to certain wildlife, such as the natterjack toad. However, this area is also home to a small population of red squirrels which have been fighting back after squirrelpox virus almost destroyed them.

Alan Hollway of Sefton Coastal Watch, who was involved in the discussions with Natural England, welcomed the decision to halt the felling, but warned that this is only a temporary decision. ESI believes there is no evidence that these trees are responsible for the loss of species, but there is plenty of evidence that red squirrels require an area of forest (studies suggest around 200ha) in order to find enough food to survive. Felling these 200,000 trees would have reduced the red squirrel habitat to 125ha.

In a letter to ESI, Natural England Chief Operating Officer, Guy Thompson, writes.

“I understand the concerns arising from the inclusion of the section in the [Mersey Forest’s 20-year working] plan. We are therefore proposing the removal of the relevant text and Mersey Forest will be publishing a revised version. This new version will be available online and will be sent to all woodland owners and the stakeholders previously consulted. I hope that the new version of the plan will provide a stronger foundation for the partnership and the local community to work together to conserve the woodlands in a way that will support both the important red squirrel population and wider interests of the site.”

ESI and red squirrel groups across northern England remain vigilant about this decision while it has only been halted.

Grey Squirrel Numbers to Increase

Grey squirrel numbers are set to increase this spring following a mild winter and an abundant supply of food available last autumn. Consistent growing conditions created good volumes of seeds, according to woodland experts.

“The squirrel population is likely to be the highest we have seen for some time,” said Graham Taylor, specialist woodland manager at Pryor & Rickett Silviculture. “Whilst last year’s mast season was modest, there were many late broods in 2015 and high overwintering survival rates due to mild conditions will lead to further population increases. Combine this with lower mast stores and this points to a high damage propensity with higher control levels being necessary to avoid it,” he added.

“This is worrying news,” said Andy Wiseman, ESI Chairman. “There has been a notable increase in grey squirrel populations and culling programmes will have to be increased. Historically, it is in years such as this that grey squirrel damage to vulnerable trees becomes apparent by the following summer. Wise forest managers should act accordingly and increase controls.”



Landscape-Scale Approach Vital To Tackling Invasive Alien Species

ESI is backing a new approach to tackling the decline in the native red squirrel population and damage to broadleaved woodland by grey squirrels.

“There have been concerted efforts by many people over recent years to save the red squirrel in the UK and halt the destruction of native broadleaved trees,” said Andy Wiseman. “While projects have been locally successful, it has become clear that if we are to have a meaningful impact on the grey squirrel population in the UK, then we need to up-scale these efforts.”

With this in mind, ESI has been working with BASC (British Association for Shooting and Conservation) to establish landscape-scale pilot projects involving its members through locally based groups adhering to strict protocols, and with the permission of landowners, to control grey squirrels by shooting with air rifles.

“BASC and ESI are launching a number of projects around the UK and we will be monitoring the success of these schemes in the hope that they will significantly reduce the damaging grey squirrel populations,” added Mr Wiseman.

“We are delighted to be working so closely with BASC, it is widely accepted by IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) and others, that shooting is an effective way to eradicate Invasive Alien Species (IAS). Any member of BASC involved in these pilot projects will receive site-specific training, work as part of an experienced team and be independently insured,” Andy Wiseman explained.

The key to the long-term success of a landscape-scale approach to grey squirrel control is close cooperation and agreement between public and private sector organisations, landowners and land managers, and is the first phase of a comprehensive control policy based on the IUCN guidelines.



Caution Urged as Grey Squirrels Implicated in Disease in Humans

Zoonosis is the transfer of disease between humans and animals. A number of cases involving infections from squirrel bites have been reported. Those handling squirrels (and indeed all wild animals) are being urged to take sensible precautions, protecting hands and, potentially, wearing goggles over the eyes.

All four types of the parasite associated with Lyme disease have been detected in grey squirrels in the UK. A large-scale study, published in by the *American Society for Microbiology*¹, found the percentage of grey squirrels carrying the pathogen increased during the early summer when more grey squirrels were infested with ticks.

There have also been cases (in the US) of serious fungal infection as a result of a squirrel bite (Lymphocutaneous Sporothrichosis). Tularemia, a potentially fatal bacterial infection carried by ticks and deer flies, also known as Pahvant Valley Plague, rabbit fever, deer fly fever or Ohara's Fever, has also been found in squirrels. A recent case (2005) in Germany, where people came into contact with the blood and uncooked meat of hares after a hare hunt, led to a number of people contracting Tularemia, with one fatality following complications due to a heart condition.

It should be noted that these cases are rare – simple precautions such as wearing thick gloves and eye protection should be enough to prevent problems.



¹ Millins C, Magierecka A, Gilbert L, Edoff A, Brereton A, Kilbride E, Denwood M, Birtles R, Biek R. 2015. An invasive mammal (the gray squirrel, *Sciurus carolinensis*) commonly hosts diverse and atypical genotypes of the zoonotic pathogen *Borrelia burgdorferi* sensu lato. *Appl Environ Microbiol* 81:4236–4245.

Pine Marten – Saint or Sinner?

In March 2014, a paper in the *Journal of Biodiversity and Conservation*² suggested that the recovery of the red squirrel in parts of Ireland was the result of growing numbers of pine martens. In fact, the paper talked of a 'population crash' in grey squirrels where they had come into contact with this native predator.

The pine marten is still relatively rare in Ireland, with most found in the south and west of the country. Recently, pine marten numbers have been recovering in the Irish Midlands. An Irish national survey on grey squirrel numbers suggested that the normally successful grey squirrel had gone into decline in this area. This was attributed anecdotally to pine martens, which are now legally protected and increasing in numbers as a result.

Could this natural predator be a way to reduce numbers of grey squirrels significantly? Naturally, ESI has taken considerable interest in this subject and as a result is organising a forum in June to discuss the pros and cons of a reintroduction of the European pine marten. The forum will include a panel of experts on the pine marten and other reintroduction projects, as well as those with direct experience of the effects of pine martens on the ground.

The authors of the paper, Emma Sheehy and Colin Lawton, carried out a survey of the midlands, using live trapping, which confirmed that the grey squirrel population had crashed in approximately 9,000 km² of its former range. They also proved that the red squirrel is now common in this area after an absence of up to 30 years. Where there were large numbers of pine martens, they concluded, there were also good numbers of red squirrels and grey squirrels were greatly reduced. This was the first evidence of a regional grey squirrel population crash and suggested that a growing population of European pine marten may be a critical factor in the American grey squirrel's success or failure as an invasive species.

Why the need to discuss the subject if it looks such a strong candidate for re-introduction?

Pine martens are part of the Mustelid family which include weasels, mink, otters and badgers. They eat carrion, squirrels and other small mammals, frogs, insects and birds. And this could be the stumbling block. While it seems that grey squirrels, which are heavier and spend more time on the ground than the nimble red squirrel, are relatively easy prey for the fast-running marten, it is not at all clear what effects pine martens have on the wider ecosystem. Do they decimate populations of frogs and song birds while they eat grey squirrels? What will their effect be on partridges and pheasants, which are an important source of income for shooting estates? What happens to red squirrels once all the greys are gone? The answer is that, at the moment, we simply don't know.

There is also the issue of legislation. Pine martens are a protected species and this means that kill traps, so useful in areas where there are no red squirrels left, cannot be used where the pine marten lives – pine martens are as likely as grey squirrels to find their way into these traps.

ESI bases its decisions on science and as yet the charity does not feel there is enough evidence to decide either way. We hope the forum in June will improve our understanding of the issues. The pine marten may turn out to be our saviour, but it may equally be that reintroduction opens a Pandora's box of other, unintended, consequences.



² 'Population crash in an invasive species following the recovery of a native predator: the case of the American grey squirrel and the European pine marten in Ireland', *Biodiversity and Conservation* March 2014, Volume 23, Issue 3, pp 753-774.

New Handbook of Grey Squirrel Control

By Charles Dutton

A comprehensive guide to grey squirrel control, *The Grey Squirrel Management Handbook*, is to be published by ESI in May 2016. Written by Charles Dutton, a Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Foresters who has worked in grey squirrel research and management for over thirty years, this practical new handbook has been designed for use in the field. Here, the author explains why he wrote the book and why a radical new approach is needed if we are to have any impact on this damaging alien species.

This new handbook reviews and compares methods of control of grey squirrels, how to identify damage to trees by grey squirrels and where you might expect to find damage in the woods. It provides information on equipment needed, where to get the equipment and how to use it, and includes a guide to current legislation. The book is presented in a ring binder and pages can be photocopied for use out in the woods. All of this will be invaluable for anyone involved in grey squirrel control, but the book does much more than that.

Over the years, tree growers have followed guidelines on control, but many of them have told me they simply don't work. One of the main reasons for controlling grey squirrels in the UK, apart from to protect remaining populations of red squirrels, is to grow broadleaved trees. At the moment, grey squirrel destruction of our broadleaved trees is so great, we simply cannot grow them.

Much of the old broadleaved woodland in Southern Britain was flattened by the great storms at the end of 80s and early 90s. After the storms, trees were cleared and planted with new broadleaved trees using taxpayers money in the form of grants. These new trees have grown and are being destroyed by the grey squirrel. Instead of healthy trees we see stunted bushes.

Have the past 70 years of control worked in the UK? They clearly haven't. So why do we carry on using the same methods if they don't work? To help understand what can and does go wrong, *The Grey Squirrel Management Handbook* includes case studies from three estates which have carried out long-term control. We look at how we control now, including shooting, trapping and immuno-contraception, but we also study wider environmental issues and silviculture – growing trees that squirrels don't strip bark from, such as cherry, conifers, ash and lime, for example.

Why don't they have the problem of tree damage in North America? In their native country, grey squirrels eat cones, they do not strip bark. There are also a host of predators which eat squirrels and Americans shoot them by the millions. With the situation so different in the UK, is eradication really feasible? Eradication has been achieved on Anglesey, which is a considerable coup. Another turning point was the IUCN (the International Union for Conservation of Nature) conference in 2002 titled 'The Eradication of Invasive Species' where hundreds of successful eradication projects of different species world-wide were reviewed.

These projects reveal the importance of knocking down a big population and then mopping up. Above all, they prove that the only way to eradication is through a landscape-scale approach, which is what we are not doing in the UK and is therefore the reason we are not winning the battle with the greys.



The Grey Squirrel Management Handbook, by Charles Dutton, will be published in May 2016, priced £15.00. It is available to pre-order from ESI – an order form is included on the back of this newsletter.

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Urban Trapping Update

By Steve Willis

In the last ESI newsletter we featured a urban-trapping project which aims to remove grey squirrels from Aberdeen. ESI asked project officer, Steve Willis, of Saving Scotland's Grey Squirrels for news.

We have close to 100 sites set up across Aberdeen, with a need for many more when we can fit in the staff time to set more sites up. A detailed survey of all available habitat in the city has shown us where greys are and hence where we need to trap.

The challenge now is getting access to gardens owned by residents associations, industrial and business parks, the two Universities and the NHS. While people and organisations are generally supportive of our efforts, negotiations can be time consuming and often require preparation of site-specific risk assessments and method statements. Both Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council remain hugely supportive of our work.

The good news is that trapping capture rates in the same locations and at the same time of year across our whole area have dropped markedly since last year. This leads us to infer that we are successfully reducing numbers of grey squirrels in these areas.

Initial results of our spring survey across the region are showing fewer areas occupied by greys and more and more areas occupied by reds.

I can also report that similar urban trapping projects have been set up by Red Squirrels Northern England, as well as in Lancashire, Northern Ireland and Dublin, following ESI's promotion of our work.



Social Squirrels

Social media is proving a useful tool in identifying issues with grey and red squirrels. This informal 'citizen science' has not only revealed how much fat grey squirrels have accumulated during the mild winter, but has also helped reveal a case of squirrelpox virus in the red squirrel stronghold on the Sefton Coast near Liverpool, by a red squirrel volunteer who lives 100 miles away in Scotland.

On the other hand, a hidden camera at a National Trust property, the house of Dun in North-East Scotland proved that at least one grey squirrel had managed to cross the Highland Red Squirrel Protection Line. The Protection Line was created in 2009 and stretches across Scotland from Montrose on the east coast to Inveraray on the west coast. This was the first grey squirrel to have been seen at the House of Dun and could be worrying news – it is well known how quickly grey squirrels can affect red squirrel populations and destroy woodland.

The 'Elgin Sweetie'

In September 2015, a grey squirrel was reported in Moray, 70 km from the nearest grey squirrel colony. Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels confirmed the sighting and set traps. There was good support from the local newspaper who ran a balanced article on why this grey squirrel needed to be removed.

Unfortunately, the story also caught the attention of one or more animal rights groups who ran an ill-informed campaign to capture the animal they renamed the 'Elgin Sweetie' and rehome it. Fortunately, Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels received immediate support from Police Scotland's Wildlife Crime Officer, who removed rival traps set up by these groups.

The grey squirrel was caught in January this year and, fortunately, tested clear for poxvirus. It was a young female which had not mated, which was further good news and suggests this was an individual brought into the area by accident, perhaps via a lorry or van. A tissue sample has been sent for laboratory analysis, which will establish the exact location this individual came from.

The Grey Squirrel Management Handbook

By Charles Dutton



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