

# Morpeth and District Red Squirrels



**Welcome to the Spring 2017 edition of the MADRS Newsletter**

Our contact details

Mobile 07570 897979

Email [enquiries@madredsquirrels.com](mailto:enquiries@madredsquirrels.com)

You can also visit our website [www.madredsquirrels.com](http://www.madredsquirrels.com)

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**Welcome to the Spring edition of our Newsletter.**

This is the first MADRS Newsletter of 2017 and we look forward to another successful year of Red Squirrel conservation. As always, If you would like to contribute to any edition of the newsletter, then please email articles, photos etc to us at [enquiries@madredsquirrels.com](mailto:enquiries@madredsquirrels.com) All contributions are gratefully received and help to make an informative and interesting newsletter.

In 2015, the MADRS grey control team removed over 1100 greys from our patch and another 720 were removed in 2016. If a third of these were female and you

think about each having 2 breeds with 3-4 young per season....well, it makes for a heck of a lot of greys damaging trees, predated on bird eggs and fledgelings and obviously spreading the killer squirrel pox virus to our native reds. As always, it is this essential work that is the greatest contributing factor to helping to safeguard our endangered native reds. We keep stressing that this is not a side of red conservation that is taken lightly. It is the necessary to ensure the survival of the reds. There is much talk of a grey squirrel infertility drug being researched but the fact is this is going to be a great many years away. Until that time, the concerted effort of our grey control team and everyone who reports sightings and people who monitor a trap in their garden, is the only saviour for the red squirrel.

All offers of help are much appreciated and it is hoped that we will be able to develop our education programme and get a bit more up to speed with social media through new volunteers with skills in these areas. Boots on the ground are essential too and if people were able to look after a small local patch of woodland that is an enormous help. Please get in touch if you'd like to have a chat about ways you might like to contribute to MADRS.

As always, please keep your eyes peeled when you are out and about and continue to report any sightings to us.

Many thanks.

Sue Mitchell  
MADRS joint co-ordinator

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## **GRANGEMOOR EWGS GRANT SCHEME.**

MADRS would like to thank Neil Dixon from the Coquetdale group for his help in dealing with the complexities of the new Woodland Management Grants, The Forestry Commission and the Rural Payments Agency again this year. Neil did an inordinate amount of work to meet the new management plan criteria that was brought in part way through our existing contract at Grangemoor. I honestly don't know how we would have resolved this without his help. Very many thanks Neil.



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### **HELP NEEDED.**

There are certain areas that are proving difficult to undertake grey control but are vital to protect nearby known Reds. Two of these areas are The Wansbeck Riverside Park near Stakeford/Ashington and Carlisle Park in Morpeth. Due to the very public nature of these places and the frequency of dog walking, it is practically impossible to undertake grey control. However, both areas are bordered by houses and if some of the residents were willing to have a live catch trap in their garden, we could remove many greys from these areas. If you border either of these places or have friends who do, please let them know we need their help. Tell neighbours and alert them to the Red conservation work we are undertaking. In many instances it's amazing what a small world it is and someone knows someone and so things get sorted.

Many thanks.

[enquiries@madredsquirrels.com](mailto:enquiries@madredsquirrels.com)

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## **BELSAY.**

MADRS would like to thank Heather Tait at Belsay for all the ground work she is doing raising awareness of the Red/Grey issue in Belsay and the surrounding area. Heather has secured the support of many neighbours and farmers as well as the Belsay Estate. Many people in the area fondly remember Reds cavorting around the trees in the local school yard and are keen to support their conservation. This vital coverage will link well with the work already carried out by Glen Graham, the Wildlife Ranger at The Wallington Hall National Trust property nearby.

It is hoped that in the near future, a group will form at Belsay to extend the range of Red Squirrel conservation in the area.

We will be arranging a public meeting for anyone interested after the lambing season so keep an eye out for this and let your neighbours and friends know.

If you would like to register your interest beforehand, then please drop us a line to [enquiries@madredsquirrels.com](mailto:enquiries@madredsquirrels.com) or a text to Heather on 07789 350182

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## **NORTH EAST RED SQUIRRELS. NeRS**

We would like to confirm the date of our NeRS Charity Launch.

Northeast Red Squirrels Launch Date: Saturday 22nd April 2017

Venue: Hazelrigg Village Hall, near Ponteland.

Time: 10am

ALL WELCOME

I hope you can come along. Please invite members of your groups.

As you may know, we set up our charity North east Red Squirrels (NeRS), to support volunteer efforts in the North East of England.

We now have two projects underway:

1. The South East Northumberland Project (which many of you have already had some input in and support from NeRS).

The aim of this Project is to work with and support all the NRS Groups and volunteers in South East Northumberland. These groups are: Ponteland, Woosington, MADRS, Cramlington, Havannah.

## 2. Red Squirrels Newcastle Project

This is a project with funding from the Post code Lottery. Our launch is a pre requisite of the Grant by PCL. We are very proud that we managed to secure this grant.

It is being led by volunteers from Ponteland, Woosington and Havannah groups. We hope to involve more volunteers from Gosforth Park, along with many more volunteers from the project area.

The focus of the Project is to expand the range of the red squirrels in the Newcastle City boundaries. We have secured permission for our operations from Newcastle City Council and are to begin our efforts in Throckley Dene.

The work is crucial, not only for the few surviving reds in the City, but also for our red populations in South east Northumberland.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU AT THE LAUNCH.

I will be sending out a similar email to the rest of the NRS Northumberland groups and also invites to several other organisations. If you would like me to invite any particular business or organisation please let me know.

Regards

Sally Hardy  
NeRS Chair  
07878 061880



Photos by Mark Legard, Stannington

Please send any photos you have and would be happy for us to include in future newsletter editions.

[enquiries@madredsquirrels.com](mailto:enquiries@madredsquirrels.com)

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### **RED SQUIRREL NEST BOXES.**

We would like to thank Brian Craske for making our nest boxes, feeders and also Hedgehog houses. We very much appreciate this help.

If you would like to order any of the above, please drop a line to [enquiries@madredsquirrels.com](mailto:enquiries@madredsquirrels.com)

Two nest boxes are shortly going out to Bedlington Golf Club who are very supportive of our work and have Reds on their course.

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### **MADRS WELCOMES NEW GROUP MEMBERS.**

It's always nice to welcome new members on board and recently we have been fortunate to have been contacted by people who were prepared to get involved with grey control locally, galvanise interest and support from surrounding neighbours, farmers and landowners, and also get involved with poster distribution and helping with other areas of the work MADRS does. It is only through an eclectic mix of abilities that we can develop our social media communication, education programme and develop our web site, in addition to the 'boots' on the ground grey control work.

A big 'Thank You' to our new recruits and here's hoping many more will follow. The success of MADRS is entirely down to volunteers.

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### **RED SQUIRREL CONSERVATION.**

Both Glen and I have met recently with a student at Kirkley Hall who is undertaking a countryside management course. She contacted MADRS to ask if it was possible to discuss the role of voluntary groups in red conservation. She is doing a project on red squirrels as part of her studies. Glen explained his work at Wallington, which demonstrates that if greys are cleared from a woodland reds

will return. In a separate meeting she and I spoke about how voluntary groups are formed and how we work.

Talking with her I was struck by how complex the world of red conservation has become. There are layers of organisations, national, regional and local. Some are well resourced; some rely on time limited funding so that once the money runs out posts vanish and work stops, and voluntary groups such as MAD RS who depend totally on donations, grants for which we apply and fund raising efforts throughout the year. Work done at each level also varies. The larger organisations tend to focus on awareness raising and exploring different ways of controlling grey squirrels. Research into the use of contraception to control grey populations: introducing pine martens as natural predators to reduce numbers of greys and allow reds to recolonise areas and, just recently, a suggestion that the DNA of greys may be manipulated to engineer a reduction in female animals and hence their ability to breed. Meanwhile the voluntary groups, along with some committed and conservation minded landowners and farmers, are getting involved in the business of grey control through culling the animals, still the most effective and immediate way of protecting red squirrels.

Areas once known to have thriving colonies of reds, Kielder for example, (though reports suggest that greys are now being found here) are protected by grey control being undertaken in “buffer zones” surrounding the forest. Rangers employed by RSNE, part of Northumberland Wildlife Trust, do this work. Reds who live in smaller groups dotted about Northumberland are dependent upon local residents for protection and for help with supplementary feeding. A network of voluntary groups work together to share information about sightings, respond to reports of greys by trapping in private gardens and shooting on land, with the permission of the land owners, and helping residents who wish to get involved in red conservation. The numbers of greys culled are impressive and make an impact on the reduction of the grey population. Significantly sightings of reds increase. Local vets, who provide support for injured or ill reds, local shops who have our collecting tins on their counters, local residents who report sightings in gardens, out walking, visiting country parks and woodlands, are all part of this effort to conserve the native reds. Kirkley Hall, where the student is studying,

provides convalescent care for recuperating reds before a release back into the wild.

Our conversation was thought provoking for me. The questions the student asked were pertinent and demonstrated just how difficult it may be for anyone not familiar with the various organisations involved to fully understand how it all works. We wish her well with her studies and, of course, especially for her squirrel project.

Kate Weightman

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### **HEDGEHOGS AGAIN.**

In previous editions I have written about the great work of the Northumbria Hedgehog Rescue based at Longframlington.

I have again this winter fostered 11 Hedgehogs for the rescue and they will be ready to go back to the wild very shortly. That's one of the pleasures about any 'rescue' work...to see native wildlife go back to their natural habitats. They have all put on weight and should be all set for a healthy life foraging about and doing what Hedgehogs do.

Like all volunteer groups, the rescue is always needing more help ranging from looking after the Hogs, manning stalls, fundraising, fostering....the list goes on. If you could give a little time to help, please get in touch.

Sue Mitchell

[www.hedgehogs-northumbria.org.uk](http://www.hedgehogs-northumbria.org.uk)

[www.facebook.com/hedgehogsnorthumbria](https://www.facebook.com/hedgehogsnorthumbria)

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Morpeth and District Red Squirrels  
(MADRS)  
[www.madredsquirrels.com](http://www.madredsquirrels.com)  
Photo courtesy of G.A. Charlton



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## **MADRS CHRISTMAS CARDS.**

Very many thanks to Kate Weightman who co-ordinated the pre orders and ensuing orders and print re-runs for the 2016 MADRS Christmas cards. Kate also hand delivered some of the cards and arranged postage of 'further away' orders. The cards proved very popular and our thanks again to Mr George Charlton for allowing us to use his lovely photos. The sale of the Christmas cards raised over £600.

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## **RED CONSERVATION RSST.**

Nick Leeming, as Chair/co-ordinator of NRS Northumberland, was invited to a Red Squirrel Survival Trust reception at Clarence House on 20 February, to celebrate two years of the UK Squirrel Accord. Here are his recollections of the day:

On arrival we were each given a name-badge with a coloured dot on it, and told to find the others with this colour on their badges, and stay together in these groups of 5 or 6 to meet HRH the Prince of Wales, who is Patron of RSST. We were addressed by Lord Gardiner of Kimble, who is Parliamentary Under-Secretary for DEFRA.

Summary....The damage done by greys to trees, birds and the displacement of red squirrels is such that (I think) something of the order of £200,000 in total is to go towards further development of an oral bait immunocontraceptive.

We were given a bowl of stew and a spoon (very nice), and stood talking in our groups, desperately trying not to spill food on clothing. HRH arrived and made his way around the room. There were roughly 60 people there, and it took him an hour and a half to work his way round. I was really impressed how he did it.

In my group was Ray Hawes, who is Head of Forestry for the National Trust. I talked to Ray about the different ways that National Trust properties in the North seem to deal with the grey problem, citing Cragside and Wallington. I must have made an impression, because when HRH came over, Ray (who had met him before) introduced me as having bent his ear about reds on NT properties in the North. HRH said what a good idea, that they were a wonderful visitor attraction and suggested we talk to the Chief Executive of the NT, Tim Parker (who came over later, and the three of us did have a conversation about it). Don't forget, HRH is President of the National Trust. I have since written to Ray formally.

HRH asked me how the volunteers were doing in Northumberland, and I told him we were barely holding the line in some places, and that we needed more resources, and that trapping simply wasn't enough. We did discuss the contraceptive, and he said that he appreciated that it was hard work keeping people interested. He then told me about the reds around his 'place in Scotland' (he has a house on the Balmoral estate - many of you will have seen pictures of him crouched by the back door feeding a red on the path). He told me that they come in through the bedroom window, and run up the curtains, then fly past your ear as they flee. As he turned to go to the next group, I called him back, and thanked him for all the work he was doing to help red squirrels. He said 'No, thank *you*'.

HRH was followed around the room by Lord Gardiner, who spoke again on funding. I said my piece about needing more help, and that if we don't get something soon there will be nothing left saving. He did concentrate on the economic argument, which I suppose is the way to most politicians' hearts (those that have hearts, anyway). He did have a point, that the damage to trees is such that there is a sound economic argument to get rid of the grey, whereas (and he didn't say this) there is very little economic justification for getting rid of greys just to bring reds back.

That 's it. Rubbing shoulders with the great and the good was fun, and it would be nice to think that a word from those on high can have a significant effect on policy within organisations. But ultimately, it will be us, the volunteers, who will make this work.

Nick Leeming

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## **SQUIRREL SURVEYS.**

From Heinz Traut RSNE

The annual spring squirrel survey is coming round again and we are needing volunteer assistance with a few tetrads in the Morpeth area. Do you know if there are any members in the group who would be keen to help for two weeks between March and May?

Bolam Lake 1SW Gr NZ083821

Bolam Lake 2NE Gr NZ077818

Choppington Woods Gr NZ241849

Plessey Woods Gr NZ239794

ps Choppington Wood a transect. The rest are camera/feeder surveys

Much appreciated if you could refer someone or put word out.

Many thanks

Heinz Traut RSNE

Tel 07887 782835

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## WOODRUFF WOOD NEWS



wildlife, well-being, woodfuel, warmth

### Tree Felling and Tree Planting

Winter is a busy time for woodland workers as there are a multitude of seasonal tasks to be done when the trees are dormant and prior to causing disturbance during the breeding season. Woodruff Wood proves no exception to this rule as our main efforts in February concentrated on both tree felling and tree planting. On paper, it all looks counterproductive – why the need to do both as surely if you don't fell the trees in the first place, you don't need to replace them by planting new ones?

Not so however – woodland management involves careful long-term planning and actions to create the desired structures and habitats to meet future aims. In our case, we hope Woodruff Wood will thrive for many years to come with an emphasis on achieving maximum biodiversity for wildlife. In order to achieve this aim, both tree felling and tree planting are necessary.

Our felling programme removes overcrowded trees (known as thinning) and widens existing rides to allow more sunlight into the wood. This encourages remaining and new trees to grow and benefits many species of flora and fauna. Our work has been concentrated on the edge of Brock's Ride which borders one of our small Scot's Pine coupes. Extra sunlight is now able to flood into this patch

of woodland which in turn should increase the number of Primroses over the next few years. We also hope to plant some young Scot's Pine here as this is a favoured tree of the Red Squirrel and our existing Pines are all even-aged (we think they are around 60+ years old). Therefore, we feel it is really important to get some younger Pines established to provide future cover, food and habitat for the Red Squirrel population. Scot's Pine is a light demanding species and will not grow in shady conditions – sunlight is essential to its survival.



Woodland ride with newly planted trees protected in guards.



Felling a limb of a Sycamore tree.

Our tree planting programme currently concentrates on planting up ride edges with wildlife friendly shrubs and small trees. We planted 100 bare-rooted saplings last month (a mix of Hawthorn, Bird Cherry, Crab Apple, Rowan and Holly),

protecting them with tall guards to prevent browsing by Roe Deer. Bare-rooted trees must be planted between November and March in order to establish themselves prior to bursting into life in spring. It is important to over plant and thin out the trees at a later date as not all of them will survive. Our ground is heavy clay and waterlogged in places which may well inhibit the growth of some trees.

### **Squirrel Update (March 2017)**

At present, we are not filling our feeder with nuts as we think that the risk of the Reds coming into contact with Grey Squirrels is too high and therefore the risk of passing on the pox virus is equally high. One or two Greys keep randomly appearing in the neighbouring area and are unpredictable in their movements. Therefore, the chances of the two species coming together at the feeder are great and so best avoided for the time being.

However, we are confident that any Red Squirrels living in Woodruff Wood aren't going hungry. There is plenty of natural food around and it looks like the Reds have recently been gorging themselves on pine cones high up as our track is littered with stripped cones beneath these trees. It is documented that Red Squirrels are left or right handed when eating pine cones – we've no idea whether this is true but it's certainly an interesting fact!

Please remember, if you sight either a Red or Grey Squirrel in the Morpeth and surrounding area, report it to MAD RS at [www.madredsquirrels.com](http://www.madredsquirrels.com) or telephone 07570 897979.

If you would like to keep up-to-date with squirrel news from Woodruff Wood (along with lots of other woodland news), please sign up to our free newsletter at [www.woodruffwood.co.uk](http://www.woodruffwood.co.uk)

If you would like further information (including details of our range of firewood), please feel free to contact us on:

T: 07525 841361

E: [info@woodruffwood.co.uk](mailto:info@woodruffwood.co.uk)

W: [www.woodruffwood.co.uk](http://www.woodruffwood.co.uk)

Julia Meldrum and Chris Tomlinson

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## **A REMINDER AS USUAL TO FEED RED SQUIRRELS YEAR ROUND.**

It's not just winter when red squirrels need feeding. They really could do with the extra help all year round and especially when feeding young. It's the same for birds too. A little extra when there are young mouths to feed always gives a bit of a helping hand.

In winter, please make sure there is water available but as always, ensure that water barrels and buckets have lids on or have a mesh ladder in them so that if anything falls in, it can get out.

If you would like to purchase a MADRS feeder then please get in touch at [enquiries@madredsquirrels.com](mailto:enquiries@madredsquirrels.com)

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Once again Thank you to everyone who contributes to the ongoing work and success of MADRS....it is very much appreciated.

Please forward this newsletter to anyone you think might be interested or circulate it round your group. If you would like to be added directly to our mailing list (our newsletter comes out 3 times a year) then please drop us a line at [enquiries@madredsquirrels.com](mailto:enquiries@madredsquirrels.com)

## **Morpeth and District Red Squirrels**

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