



Hilary Higgins wins 2017 volunteer of the year trophy

Hilary has been a dedicated woodland monitor for 20 years and as the majority of people who train do not complete a year, this is a tremendous achievement.

Not only does Hilary carry out bi-annual monitoring in Bouldnor, she is the only one who has carried on with the monthly monitoring. This work gives a good perspective on the squirrel population here.

Twenty years ago numbers were very high, then a thinning programme thinned out the squirrels as well as the trees. Since then, numbers have fluctuated wildly depending on the weather and tree management in this working forest.

If you think you have this sort of dedication and would like to monitor a wood, please get in touch.

Red squirrel survey

This survey, based on scientific methodology, confirms presence or absence of red squirrels in woodland blocks and isolated woods over 2ha to record the presence- or absence- of red squirrels. Most of the surveys were done via public paths but a big thank you goes to landowners who allowed access to their wood for this survey.

The survey confirmed red squirrels are widespread on the Isle of Wight and that connectivity between woodland blocks has been improved through schemes such as JIGSAW. Of woodland blocks sampled, 95% were positive for red squirrel presence.

In spite of the very poor hazelnut crop, split nuts were found in 75 % of woods, whilst 11% were stripped pine cones. Only 10 squirrels were seen during the whole survey.

It was interesting to note that in a very poor seed crop year, the hazel that produced nuts were the large old stools. Often it was hard to find one or two fresh nuts, whilst there were many old shells from last year.

The smaller stools, particularly if shaded, do not produce a good nut crop even in average years. Edge stools of around 10 years usually produce a nut crop but, for the most part, even these did not do well in 2016.

The next stage is to look at smaller woods, corridors and supplementary feeding.

Wight Squirrel Project is self-supporting and relies on fundraising and donations. Help us by becoming a 'Friend of the Red Squirrel' for a year by giving a minimum donation of £5 per person. Contact details are at the bottom of the page. Membership gives access to our private hide.

Acknowledgements

Dave Dana and woodland monitors Mike, Ann, Helen, Carolyn for help at shows
Hopper monitors: Goodleaf Tree Climbing, Carol, Moana and Richard Bob & Jacque Wilson
Michael Hodge
Jewson Moreys
Mike Evans
Vic Simpson

**A special thank you to
Goodleaf Tree Climbing for
making Wight Squirrel Project
their charity for 2017**

WSP T'shirt

You can buy a Wight Squirrel Project t'shirt online via Teemill.
<https://wightsquirrelproject.teemill.com/>

For each t'shirt bought Wight Squirrel Project will receive £4.50 to help fund their work.



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New logo designed by Kate Northover

WIGHT SQUIRREL PROJECT

The Isle of Wight Red Squirrel Conservation Group
Founded 1993

Affiliated to The Conservation Volunteers

Charity Manager Helen Butler BSc MBE
Newsletter 21 Autumn 2017



Leprosy testing in IOW squirrels

Leprosy was first diagnosed in red squirrels on the Isle of Wight in 2015. Visual signs to look for are unusual ear and skin lesions, although animals with the leprosy bacteria do not always have symptoms. Helen collected ear samples during routine post-mortem examinations she did on 93 squirrels found dead from all around the Island.

Deaths due to natural or unknown causes accounted for 33% of cases and 67% were as a direct result of human activity, especially road traffic. Helen took the samples to Moredun Research Institute and, after training, tested them for leprosy.

Only one out of the samples proved positive. The affected squirrel was an adult male that was a road traffic accident in 2016. There were no visible signs of leprosy. It would be interesting to know if there has ever been a leprosy hospital on the Isle of Wight. Are there any historians out there?

In the past we have had two confirmed cases of leprosy in squirrels on the Isle of Wight, one had died in 2004 and the second in 2011. The infection is at a low level in the population and has almost certainly been present on the island - and the rest of the country - for a long time.

Helen says she is grateful for the opportunity to work at such a renowned research institute and thanks Karen Stevenson and Joyce McLuckie for all the help they gave in the month she was a visiting worker.

Helen is also grateful to Vic Simpson who introduced her to Moredun and has been a source of expertise and encouragement for many years.



Photo: © Moredun Photo Library 2017

Helen Butler and Karen Stevenson

The study was funded by Wight Squirrel Project and the Scottish Government Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services Division. Thank you also to The Veterinary Record for publishing the findings so quickly.

Helen would like to use the DNA to see how closely Island squirrels are related to each other.

Wight Squirrel Project App

To make it easier for citizen scientists to report sightings of red squirrels on the Isle of Wight, local firm Isle Cre8, a small development team in Shanklin, has developed an app for Wight Squirrel Project.

The app itself is available for download on both Android and iPhone devices from each app store. The app allows the quick sending of sightings and allows us to track the red squirrel population closer. Tap the find location while filling out the form and your exact position will be sent to us, no more looking at maps to find the location you are at. The app is completely free on both devices by going to:



The first person to download the app was Kingsley Hollis, helped by Robert Kettleby from IsleCre8

squirrelcdn.co.uk/submit-a-sighting



COME TO SEE ME AND MY FRIENDS AT SHANKLIN CHINE OPEN FROM EASTER TO OCTOBER

Road signs

Eye-catching squirrel signs have been produced in a campaign to slow down traffic in squirrel road-death blackspot areas on the Island, and help was needed from the public to get them on display.

The signs are not permitted to be on the public highway, but can be erected in a prominent position on private property where motorists can see them. Response was good and all the signs have been allocated. Only places where a number of deaths are reported annually have a sign..

This campaign to get motorists to watch their speed is jointly funded by the Wight Squirrel Project, which gathers data to determine where the signs should go, and the IOW Red Squirrel Trust which focuses on educating people about red squirrels and their habitat.

Over several years Wight Squirrel Project has been suggesting to people who complained about road kills, to make their own quirky sign to put in their garden. Thanks to Peter Foister of Woodside who contacted Helen, the idea has been taken a stage further. Peter was becoming frustrated with the amount of unnecessary squirrel deaths on his road. He passed the idea on to illustrator Kate Northover and she designed the posters.

Northern Ireland's friends at Tollymore Red Squirrel Group, kindly donated sticky backed red squirrel signs, designed by the Glens Red Squirrel Group, which were quickly snapped up.



Anniversary calendar



To start our 25 year celebrations, we have a very nice 2018 calendar for sale. The subject is 'garden squirrels' and sells for £5. Numbers are limited so get one quick by contacting Helen using the details at the bottom of the pages or visiting the Red Squirrel shop in Ryde High Street.



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Red Squirrel DVD



The new DVD has been changed into 2 DVD's as the 5 films were too big for one disk. The first is now for sale and has 3 films, Reds versus greys, Red squirrels and humans and the story of a hand-reared baby squirrel, in his own words.

The next DVD, available by Christmas 2017, will be another 3 films, A year in the life of a red squirrel, Wight Squirrel Project work and where and how to see red squirrels.

DVD's are available at Red Squirrel shop in Ryde High Street or by contacting Wight Squirrel Project.

Thanks go to Mr & Mrs Thompson for raising money to help with costs.

If you are at Alum Bay, visit 'The Largesse' where funds are raised for local charities via donations.



Mrs Thompson at The Largesse

2018 is our 25th anniversary - time for name change?

There will be an event to celebrate, so watch out on our website or via your email next year. If you are willing to run or host an event, please let Helen know using the contact details below.

The name has been discussed before but there is still some controversy. Having taken some professional advice, it's been suggested that the strapline 'The Isle of Wight Red Squirrel Conservation Group' is used. It is rather long and another suggestion is Vectis Red Squirrel Group. Please let me know your thoughts. Suggestions will be put to the vote before a decision is made.

The charity covers monitoring, research, post mortem examinations plus caring for sick/injured/orphaned red squirrels.

Helen founded and runs the group, voluntarily, with help and advice from long standing, loyal volunteers.



Why you should report to Wight Squirrel Project

Basically, if you don't report squirrels in your garden, then it's not possible to write in to confirm squirrels are there when trees in your area are threatened. It's no good waiting until it happens!

The same goes for road signs, if deaths are not reported then signs or food hoppers at road crossing points cannot go up. You can download the app, go online, email, ring, write or go into the shop to report sightings - so there is no excuse!

Stalwart volunteer, Michael Hodge, is still entering general sightings on the programme he wrote himself. This very useful work leaves Helen time to enter the other data.



Updated 'Red squirrels in the garden' leaflet



Although a bite from a rodent can kill a squirrel, some methods of pest control can (and do) cause squirrel fatalities. Fully qualified pest controllers can mitigate the risks to non-target species, such as the red squirrel, by following best practice guidelines such as environmental adaptations and sustainable control methods. If you require pest control but are concerned for the welfare of nearby red squirrels then make sure you go to the experts!



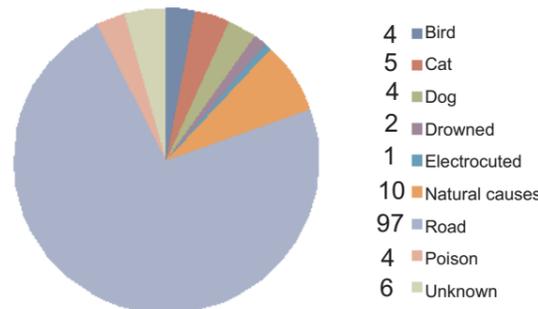
Wight Squirrel Project thanks Hillbans for sponsoring the new leaflet.

Citizen Science results

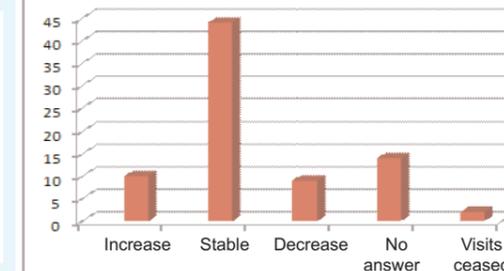
Red squirrel post mortem examinations

This has been a very busy year for post mortem examinations. From July 1st 2016 - July 1st 2017, 41 post mortem examinations have been carried out by Helen. Of these, 22 were due to road traffic, 11 natural causes, 7 predators and 3 from rat poison. Thank you to all those people who picked up dead animals and froze them until they could be picked up.

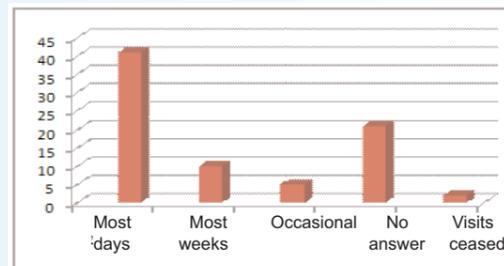
Pie chart showing breakdown of reported red squirrel deaths on the Isle of Wight. July 2016 - July 2017



Of the 76 garden questionnaire respondents, 42 people reported seeing juvenile squirrels in the garden



Graph showing increase/decrease in numbers



Graph showing frequency of visits

Garden Squirrels Questionnaire Please circle your answers. Thank you for your time.

Name & address.....
.....Postcode.....DATE.....

Do squirrels visit:	Most days	Most weeks	Occasionally	
The average number in:	Winter	1 or 2	2-5	Over 5
	Spring	1 or 2	2-5	Over 5
	Summer	1 or 2	2-5	Over 5
	Autumn	1 or 2	2-5	Over 5
Over the last year have squirrels:	Increased	Decreased	Remained Stable	
Did you notice any juveniles?	Yes	No		

It's important to know if your squirrels have stopped coming. Disappearing temporarily in the autumn doesn't count!!!
DON'T FORGET THE POSTCODE!

Please post to the address below. Alternatively, fill in the online questionnaire - www.wightsquirrels.co.uk