

Rod Stone is 2016 volunteer of the year trophy holder

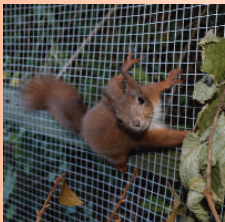


Helen presenting the trophy to Rod with Martha looking on

Rod has been supportive since I started red squirrel work 25 years ago. He has a very different skill set to other volunteers - plus some heavy duty equipment! Rod is a farmer and his tractor, trailer, bandsaw, strimmer and chainsaw have been very useful at times.

Rod built the hide we have at Quarr and an aviary for rehabilitating sick, injured or young squirrels. Recycling has been a feature of his contribution too. For example, a digger track is now a raised bed at The Red Squirrel Dell in Pell Lane recreation ground and benches made from tree trunks have been popular in the rec as well.

This is very specialised work for which we are very grateful. Few have these facilities and even fewer willing to help a local charity in this way. Thanks very much Rod!



Aviary



Raised bed from digger track

Wight Squirrel Project is self-supporting and relies on fundraising and donations. Help to keep us going by becoming a 'Friend of the Red Squirrel' for a year by giving a minimum donation of £5 per person. If you want to save postage, then ring for details on how to pay straight into Wight Squirrel Project bank account or go online and fill in the form. Details are at the bottom of the page.

Acknowledgements

Dave Dana and woodland monitors
Mike, Ann, Helen, Carolyn, Ant, Abi, Bernie and Sarah for help at shows
Goodleaf Tree Climbing, Carol and Richard for filling food hoppers
Bob & Jacquie Wilson
Michael Hodge
Jewson Moreys
Mike Evans for making feeders & dreys

Quarr

A volunteer would be welcome to help Richard at our Quarr hide. He has religiously been filling up the feeders every few days since the hide was put up 3 years ago. Is there anyone who can help out when he is away or can take on a day or two each week? Wight Squirrel Project supplies the food of course!

Dave Baker is helping design a hopper that will need filling perhaps only once a week, which will reduce work for volunteers. I would also like to make a more photogenic setup at the hide as people often want to photograph the squirrels as well as watch them. Any ideas?

Ring Helen on 611003 if you can help or have any ideas.



Red squirrel at our Quarr hide

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WIGHT SQUIRREL PROJECT

The Isle of Wight Red Squirrel Conservation Group
Founded 1993

Affiliated to The Conservation Volunteers

Project Manager Helen Butler MBE

Newsletter 21
Autumn 2016

American red-tailed hawk and leprosy making headlines

These headlines made the papers over the last year, so I would like to update you as I've had phone calls and emails from quite a few worried red squirrel fans

Leprosy in red squirrels is a recent discovery, not because it is a new disease but because nobody had picked up on it before. As it is widespread, from Scotland to the Isle of Wight and Brownsea, it's likely it has been around in red squirrel populations for centuries.

When I started working with red squirrels 25 years ago I noticed some had 'warty ears' but thought no more of it as they bred and seemed well in other respects. It takes a long time for the disease to progress so most animals would die of something else before the leprosy really took hold.

It doesn't seem to spread easily as there may be only one squirrel that has it in a population. It certainly won't wipe out our reds any time soon.

There is more research going on and I will give you updates either on the website or via the newsletter. Meanwhile, don't panic!!



A healthy red squirrel's ear



Leprosy on a red squirrel's ear

If you see a red squirrel on the Island with what looks very like 'warts' on the ears, or elsewhere on its body, please let me know. A grid ref or postcode is very helpful if you can please, otherwise the name of the wood or park where you saw the animal. A photo would be great if you can get one! Contact details are on the bottom of each page.

This female **American red-tailed hawk** was photographed eating a red squirrel which the photographer, Tina, had witnessed was caught alive. The bird didn't continue to munch her way through the rest of the reds in the Seaview area though - thank goodness!

The American red-tailed hawk is closely related to our common buzzard and, I'm reliably told, can mate with them and produce offspring successfully.

As the two species look very much alike it's difficult for the public to distinguish between the species unless they get a close look. This has made it harder to keep a track of the bird which escaped from its Newport home in April this year. To date she is still at large.

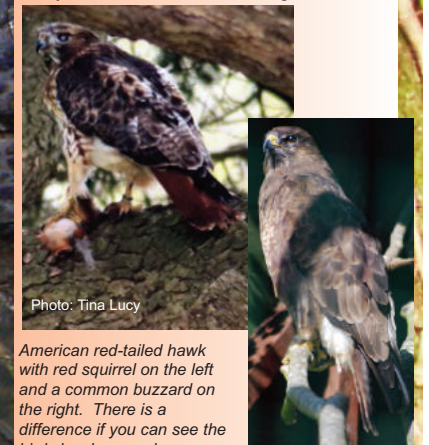


Photo: Tina Lucy

American red-tailed hawk with red squirrel on the left and a common buzzard on the right. There is a difference if you can see the bird closely enough



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Reds in Ryde

When Ryde Town Council invited applications for a grant to promote Ryde, we saw an opportunity to advertise red squirrels and events in and around Ryde.

There are five free walks around Ryde scheduled between June and the end of September 2016. As Ryde is the red squirrel hotspot this year the timing is excellent!

Keep your eyes open for a Red Squirrel Week event in Ryde. It will be on our website, the IW County Press and onthewight website.

There are leaflets available at many outlets on the island and around the south coast in order to encourage people to visit Ryde and look for red squirrels.



Red squirrel survey

About every 5 years an all island red squirrel survey is undertaken. Citizen Science is great but it does leave areas unrecorded. I will be starting the survey in September and the results will be in the 2017 newsletter.

I am also starting to write up a huge report on red squirrels on the Isle of Wight over the last 25 years. A DNA study is planned as well but this relies on the use of a university lab.

Further studies may be necessary once all the data is written up and there are gaps or areas where it may help our reds if we have more knowledge. It will not be intrusive to the squirrels if I am carrying it out! Alternative survey methods will be part of the study.



Volunteer help!

Although Wight Squirrel Project has loyal and long term volunteers, to progress red squirrel work on the Isle of Wight, we could do with new volunteers with a variety of skills.

Have you any time to spare and a particular skill you could offer to help our precious reds? You can opt to do only a few hours a year if you like and offer something you particularly enjoy doing whilst helping a good cause.

New Red Squirrel DVD

I have been working hard on the production of an updated DVD. It consists of 5 short films: A year in the life of a red squirrel
Reds versus greys
Wight Squirrel Project Work
Squirrels and Humans
The story of a hand reared baby squirrel
The DVD will be available from the Red Squirrel shop in Ryde and other outlets around the Island in the autumn.

Sad loss of Jean Foister

We are very sad at the loss of Jean, who was a loyal red squirrel supporter from the time I began in 1991. I was later told she was instrumental in getting the first funding for me to get started, although she was modest and didn't say so at the time.

Latterly she helped us get set up in the Ryde shop, which is owned by her family.

Tree felling

I often get calls from people re trees being cut down. Whilst it is distressing, sadly I have no authority whatsoever to stop it. All I can do is pass your message on to the tree officer at County Hall. You could go straight to him yourself to save time!

If you suspect a drey has been cut down, please try to get photographic evidence, ring 101 and asked for the wildlife liaison officer.

Hardly a week goes by without a distress call re development or tree felling. Whilst I will write to planning on behalf of Wight Squirrel Project if I have records and can make a case, I cannot write in if there are no historic records. If you have squirrels in the garden please make sure you fill in the questionnaire, ring, email or fill in the online form - you never know when the records will be needed!

Citizen Science results

Here are some of the results 'Citizen Scientists' sent in. There was one new way to die - fall on a pyracantha! The squirrel feeder was placed above a particularly vicious plant which has very long spikes, so presumably the poor squirrel either fell or jumped on to it not realising it was spiky. The feeder has now been moved to a safer spot. Just one more hazard to look out for in your garden! It's recorded under 'natural causes' below.

Reported deaths 1st July 2015 - July 5th 2016

Road kills	75
Cat/dog	7
Bird	4
Rat poison	2
Natural causes	8
Unknown	8
TOTAL	104

Garden questionnaire replies 2015.

Total responses 73

Frequency	
Daily	37
Weekly	3
Occasionally	6
Stopped coming	3
No Answer	24
Status:	
Increased	19
Decreased	9
Stable	32
No answer	10
Numbers:	
1 or 2	35
2 to 5	27
Over 5	8

Babies seen in 58 gardens

As you can see from the table, 2 more squirrels brought in for post mortem examinations were found to have ingested rat poison.

It is illegal to put poison or traps down where there are red squirrels unless you take very careful precautions.

Use a rat bait box, put it in a tunnel and cover it up well. This goes for fenn traps as well, if you must use them.



2016 so far



Breeding started early this year and it appears that although young have been born, the survival rate is not particularly good.

I have had babies or sub-adults in for post mortem that have had so many fleas they have died of anaemia. Perhaps the mild winter was good for flea survival!!

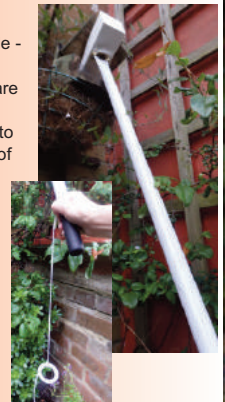
Road casualties are higher than last year but that usually reflects a higher number of squirrels.

Squirrels are doing well in and around gardens, with most people reporting an increase and seeing young. Sadly none of the young we have had brought in have survived so far this year.

Dave's invention

Dave Baker has invented - and made - a clever device for filling feeders that are above head height. This will enable us to put up feeders out of reach from those who seem to delight in taking or destroying property.

If you would like one for yourself, ring Dave on 812460.



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

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

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

DON'T FORGET THE POSTCODE!