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**Subject:** MAD RS Summer 2015 Newsletter  
**Date:** 23 July 2015 10:03  
**To:** mitch@adventurexcr.plus.com

# Morpeth and District Red Squirrels



Welcome to the Summer 2015 edition of the MADRS Newsletter

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Morpeth and District Red Squirrels (MADRS) continues to go from strength to strength. We are really pleased to welcome another 9 grey controllers to the group who are all helping in the constant regime of grey control to help ensure the survival of our native reds. From January through to June, MADRS has collectively removed 553 greys. A huge Thank You to everyone who contributes to this vital work as without it, our native iconic red squirrel would not survive.

Please remember it is vital to provide food and water for our reds at this time of the year. 75% of red squirrel kittens die in their infancy from malnutrition. Please also remember to cover water barrels and buckets of water or provide a mesh 'ladder' so if anything falls in, it can get out. (That's baby birds as well as squirrels)

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## Funding

Since the previous newsletter we have been fortunate to have been given a generous donation from Bedlingtonshire Rotarians. I had the pleasure of attending one of their meetings, and dinner, to receive the cheque. We have also been allocated a large grant by the Ridley Family Charity specifically to fund grey control. This has enabled us to start the strategic grey control programme we have been planning since last year. We are grateful to both organisations but also to those local businesses and shop keepers who display our collecting boxes, every penny counts!

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## Annual General Meeting

This was held in Longhirst village hall on June 24. The “elections” returned the same people to serve as Joint Coordinators, Treasurer, Trapping advisor and Education lead although it must be admitted there was not an overwhelming rush of people wanting to take on these roles. We are pleased that Julia Meldrum and Chris Tomlinson are continuing as Core Group members. Mike Jeffrey has agreed to be co-opted for another year; we value his support and advice enormously. We would like to encourage anyone who is interested in joining the Core group to contact us, fresh ideas and skills are always welcome. We considered the activities undertaken by MADRS over last year; the annual report should be available on the web site for those of you not able to hear Sue’s presentation. Our role in examining planning applications was also discussed, increasingly such applications are threatening native wildlife and we have lodged objections where we think these are justified.

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MADRS members Kate Weightman, Chris Tomlinson and Julia Meldrum meet with Steven Sykes at Kirkley Hall. MADRS has established a link with Kirkley to provide care and rehabilitation for any poorly or injured red squirrels.



for any poorly or injured red squirrels. Kitty, the red squirrel featured in Tales from Northumberland with Robson Green, was one of the MADRS orphaned kittens successfully reared and released back to the wild by the staff at Kirkley.

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## Cramlington & District Red Squirrel Group

CADRSG were officially formed in October 2014. We currently have five members in the team looking after approximately 80 feeders in the area, spanning the district from Arcot /Plessey in the West, to South Newsham, New Hartley & Seaton Delaval to the East.

We have Red strongholds in the New Hartley Woodlands & East Cramlington Nature Reserve with the odd Grey incursion in the latter. The Reds are not only hanging on but starting to increase their numbers at Arcot, where we are carrying out Grey control on a more regular basis. However this will be ongoing (along with Plessey Woods, where we plan to start some work) as the Grey population of the Blagdon Estate continue to push out to the East. We are looking to extend our area to Holywell Dene at some stage, securing woodland in the hope that the Reds at New Hartley will push out back into the fringes of North Tyneside.

We are looking to increase the number of the group to help carry out this work, so if anyone knows of anybody in the area that could monitor feeders etc for us, please put them in touch with us. We can be contacted at the email address below.

John Carr Coordinator, CADRSG  
Email – [john.carr.2000@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:john.carr.2000@hotmail.co.uk)



Team member John Kelly displays his MADRS conservation sign on his van.

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## A 'Grey' Night

Our second 'Trappers' Night was a little delayed but when everyone finally got together,

we had a really enjoyable night. 'Trappers Night' as we call it, is organised by the Core Group who invite all our Grey control team for a pint to say thank you and generally to catch up together. We meet at a local pub where the landlady does us proud with lovely sandwiches to be washed down with the pint. The pint and sandwiches are paid for by the Core Group members themselves, we do not take any monies from MADRS funds as this is all spent on red squirrel conservation. This is our little thank you to the team for the great work they do.

The Grey control team are essential members of our group They do the necessary work of trapping and shooting and removing grey squirrels that have ventured in to our area. No one in the group enjoys this task, but if we are to preserve and grow the red squirrel populations in our area, it just has to be done and we are very grateful that they are so efficient with their response to grey sightings reported by the general public. We now have about 17 'Trappers' who cover our area really and the group is steadily growing. At the time of this newsletter, over 550 greys have been removed so far this year. This has already exceeded last years total and reflects on the increased number of control team members.

The informal meeting is, of course, open to anyone who is interested in our work and we were fortunate to have some friends and neighbours of Alan Richardson along. They also feed the red squirrels in their garden and we did enjoy meeting up with them and getting to know them.

If you are interested and have some time to help with grey control then do contact the group.

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## **Gallagher Park**

In 1968, The Bedlington "D" Doctor Pit closed. In 1970, the spoil heap and colliery buildings were reclaimed by Northumberland County Council. This area was landscaped to create a new outdoor recreational facility, covering 70 acres, that is now known as Gallagher Park.

This extensive park is managed by a steering group made up of Friends of Gallagher Park, Bedlington Forum, East Bedlington Parks Council, Bedlington Development Trust and Barnesbury Cycling Club; all of whom meet up every 3 months to make decisions on how to move forward with the park.

To mark the London 2012 Olympic Games, the park was designated a "Queen Elizabeth II Field" as part of a national initiative to provide long-term safeguards for outdoor recreation areas. This honour was bestowed to encourage the public to participate in all kinds of physical recreation.

Gallagher Park boasts coniferous and deciduous woodlands, wildflower meadows, large grassed areas and playing fields. There are 3 football pitches, used by Saturday & Sunday football clubs, a BMX cycle track, downhill mountain bike tracks and a multi-unit games area. A long path from Schalksmuhle Road to Rothesay Terrace provides a slowly winding path through the park on which to take a leisurely stroll, a jog, a bike ride or a dog walk. There are seats and benches dotted along the way if you need to rest and if you look closely, you will spot that some of the benches are held aloft by Bedlington's famous terriers; there are also picnic tables available for use.

Beside the children's play park stand 3 metallic statues of Sir Daniel Gooch, Dr John Brown and Mary Weightman, all of whom were chosen by the people of Bedlington to represent the local community.

Sir Daniel Gooch was an engineer who learnt his trade at Bedlington Ironworks. He later moved on to work for Brunel and designed many steam engines. He then helped to engineer the first telegraph cable under the Atlantic Ocean, linking the United Kingdom with the United States of America.

Dr John Brown was a local GP who gave much of his time voluntarily helping the town's mining community; teaching miners first aid and often heading into the mine to treat injured workers. He would often give his service for free if his patients couldn't afford to pay.

Mary Weightman founded the local People's Animal Welfare Service charity (PAWS). Once she retired from the charity, she actively continued to fundraise to help animals in the area.

The wildlife that inhabit Gallagher Park include a wide variety of birds, including song thrush, green finch, robin & tit; deer can be seen – if you are lucky – in the thick woodland; and of course, our beloved red squirrels. In 2014, 2 squirrel nesting boxes were mounted 60 feet high in the trees. If you walk beside the fir trees near the Schalksmuhle Road entrance, you will see that animal lovers leave 'monkey' nuts at the base of the fir trees for a treat for the squirrels. The reds can often be seen scampering over the grass and path to visit the gardens that border the park where many residents have feeders especially erected for their visits.

The next possible projects for the park are a skateboard park, a pavilion, 3 dias installations for maps of the park and especially formulated walking trails. We are so lucky to have such a lovely outdoor space right in the middle of Bedlington.

Lynne Metcalf

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## Woodruff Wood News



wildlife, well-being, woodfuel, warmth



Following on from our article in the winter newsletter whereby we introduced ourselves and our wood, we hoped it might be of interest to write a series of pieces about Woodruff Wood throughout the seasons. Woodland management, history, wildlife & biodiversity and of course, our latest squirrel news will all feature.

Woodruff Wood is a semi-natural mixed species woodland. It has mostly regenerated naturally rather than been planted and is comprised predominantly of native species. Although not particularly big at 28 acres, the wide variety of habitats within, enable it to be host to an equally diverse range of wildlife. These habitat types are a mixture of broadleaved woodland, coniferous woodland, wet woodland, coppice, open spaces, rides & woodland edges and deadwood. All are valuable for different reasons but to start off with, we'll take a look at the latter mentioned habitat – deadwood.

Deadwood is an essential part of a 'healthy' wood and certainly should not be removed (unless it is deemed to be a health & safety risk). There is a misconception that woodland management means 'tidying up' Woodruff Wood by such activities as removing fallen, dead and decaying wood - not so!! In fact, up to a fifth of woodland species rely upon deadwood for all or part of their life cycle in the UK. Forestry guidelines recommend that all woodlands are managed for deadwood and this is true for Woodruff Wood with 18% being classified as deadwood. This percentage was calculated by choosing random 10m x 10m survey plots throughout the wood, counting the number of both living and dead stems within each plot and averaging out the results.

Both standing and fallen deadwood are important habitats along with tree stumps and decaying wood. Species which depend upon deadwood include lichens, fungi, bryophytes, invertebrates, hole-nesting birds and mammals. Within Woodruff Wood, three important priority species which all nest/roost within deadwood are Willow Tits, Tree Sparrows and bats. The Willow Tit in particular is in desperate need of our help as numbers have declined by 83% in the UK between 1995 and 2012. Therefore, as part of our management, we have created a mosaic of tree stumps within one of the woodland's wildlife corridors. Once these stumps have had time to decay, it is hoped that the Willow Tits will excavate rot holes within them to create nesting sites. Time will tell if this technique proves successful but in the meanwhile we'll just have to be patient.

### **Squirrel News**

Following on from the outbreak of squirrelpox amongst our resident population of Red Squirrels last November, no sightings have been observed since that time. However, we are keeping our feeders topped up with peanuts in shell and these have been going down in recent weeks – so we remain optimistic that a small number of Reds have either survived or moved in from elsewhere.

Broken peanut shells lie discarded beneath the feeders hence our belief that this is due to fresh squirrel activity.

We did though, hear a strange 'thudding' sound whilst walking in the wood one evening last week. On looking in the direction of the noise, a Jay was seen flying away from a feeder. We had suspected for a while that something other than squirrels were also helping themselves to the food and so finally we had the proof – the thudding noise was the wooden feeder lid closing after the Jay had lifted it to 'steal' a peanut!

If you would like further information, 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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## NEWS IN BRIEF

- Excellent article about MADRS in Morpeth Herald w/c Thursday July 9th
- MADRS attended a very successful Cambo Village fete.
- New squirrel group set up at Burgham.
- Sightings in this area can be reported to Vicky at [bpsquirrel6@gmail.com](mailto:bpsquirrel6@gmail.com)
- North East Red Squirrels has gained charity status - more details in the next newsletter

August 4 I shall be with Katy Cook of Red Squirrels Northern England at Plessey Woods from 10am for a repeat of last summer's successful 'red squirrel day'. It is an excellent opportunity for children (and their grownups!) to learn more about squirrels, go on a wild life walk and generally enjoy the surroundings. If you are able to join me please get in touch: Kate 01670 515504



### MADRS Ranger Fund

We have a MADRS Ranger account set up with HSBC (which is separate from the main MADRS account) and all monies received into this account are solely for the funding of this project. Please contact us if you are interested in supporting this venture and we can give you more information and either email or post a standing order form to you.

Our grateful thanks to those who have already contributed to the Ranger project.

As always, a huge thank you to everyone who contributes to the continuing work and success of MADRS. It is a collective effort from our grey control team, poster distributors, squirrel feeders and feeder makers, squirrel spotters and reporters, our 'core' team, our Twitter and Facebook page looker afterers.....the list is endless.

Very many thanks to everyone who contributes to helping to ensure the ongoing survival of our native red squirrel.

### ***Morpeth and District Red Squirrels***

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*All red squirrel images kindly provided by Mark Legard, Stannington*

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