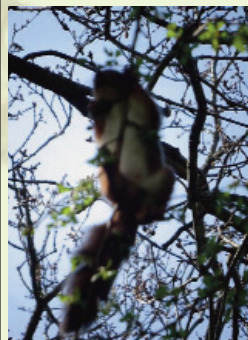


Odd nesting places and a dramatic rescue

The roof of a tractor is the last place you would expect to find a mother squirrel and her kittens but apparently one mother thought otherwise!

The first rescue of the year was unusual to say the least! A mother squirrel had built her drey in a hollow branch over a very well used public path. She moved one baby and put it on a nearby bank then went back for another baby. As she came out, people approached and she instinctively opened her mouth to swear and dropped baby! Luckily baby clung to a very thin branch, however Mum was too heavy to retrieve baby from the twig.

Helen was called and with help from nearby resident, Sandy, who had long handled loppers and a sheet - plus help from passersby - the kitten was cut down from the twig and landed safely in the sheet. The kitten was put with its sibling ready for Mum to collect. She had not deserted her babies but had been watching us rescue the her baby!



The kitten clinging to a twig

Mum didn't learn by her mistake and had another litter in the same place. Two kittens were found on the ground this time, presumably they wriggled and fell out. One died but the other was raised by Jacquie and released. Mum was nowhere to be seen this time.



The three holes in the oak tree

Road signs

Thanks to Beardsalls for supplying road signs. You can now buy red squirrel road signs from the Red Squirrel Hub in Ryde High Street, they cost £15. Please ensure they are on private land and not causing a problem to traffic. Fix them well as some are still being stolen!



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 £10 per person. Membership gives access to our private hide. A book is included with the initial subscription. The charity cannot continue without public support.

Contact details are at the bottom of the page.

Acknowledgements

Dave Dana and woodland monitors
Mike, Ann, Helen, Carolyn for help at shows
Hopper monitors: Goodleaf Tree Climbing, Carol and Moana
Bob & Jacquie Wilson
Michael Hodge
Mike Evans

Ian Rennie volunteer award 2019

Ian hasn't been with us for as long as other trophy winners but he has achieved a lot. As a computer whizz he has managed to help with the massive database and has produced the maps and graphs in this newsletter.

We needed an app so people can report squirrel sightings and Ian produced one for us. Details of how to download it are on the inside page.



The world seems to rely on technology these days so having people who are experts to help out is essential to the future success of the charity.

The first winner of the trophy, in 2011 was Michael Hodge. He wrote the programme that inputs the data you report to Wight Squirrel Project and he still inputs general sightings.

This leaves Helen time to input woodland monitoring, post mortem data and treatment of sick/injured and baby squirrels. It's all very time consuming. Many thanks Michael and Ian!

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WIGHT SQUIRREL PROJECT
THE ISLE OF WIGHT RED SQUIRREL CONSERVATION GROUP

Wight Squirrel Project

Founded 1993

Affiliated to The Conservation Volunteers

Charity Manager Helen Butler BSc MBE

Autumn 2019



First DNA results not as expected!

Three islands DNA study

A batch of 25 DNA samples, which were left over from leprosy testing, were sent to Bournemouth University. Geneticist Emilie Hardouin and ecologist Kathy Hodder put them together with samples from Brownsea Island and Furzey Island to see how red squirrels from the three islands compared.

Results showed that genetic diversity was low overall, on the other hand, unique genetic strains were also discovered. The Isle of Wight red squirrels are genetically most closely related to other British squirrels. The Isle of Wight reds may also be related to squirrels from South East England with the others from the North, North-West and Jersey.

There is even a possibility that Brownsea and Isle of Wight populations might be remnants of an original red squirrel population as there is no evidence of introductions in these islands. In other parts of the country many releases of red squirrels from continental populations appear in historical records. Although more evidence would be required to be sure, at the moment, there is no sign of Scandinavian origins on the islands.

To take this genetic study further, Helen sent another 125 tissue samples to Bournemouth University. This time it will be focusing on how our Isle of Wight red squirrels relate to each other. More importantly, it will allow Helen to look at causes of mortality to see if there is a correlation between inbreeding and disease or if there are any problem areas on the island.

Each animal that Helen has autopsied is given an ID number, this has aided previous scientific research and will also contribute to this study.

Thank you!

A big thank you is due to members of the general public who picked up dead squirrels for Helen to autopsy. Without your help, non-invasive studies could not be undertaken. Wight Squirrel Project supporters believe it is much better to study dead animals rather than stress live ones.

Having examined well over 700 dead red squirrels, giving a vast amount of information and tissue samples, Helen is having a rest from road traffic post mortems and focusing on other causes of death.

All this data is in the process of being written up and will be published but with such a huge amount it will take time!

Isle of Wight red squirrels vary widely in coat colour so Helen was surprised no continental relationship was found in the first batch of DNA testing. It was thought the virtually black coats may be indicative of some European red squirrels. At present this appears to be wrong!

Another thank you goes to people who become a 'Friend of the red squirrel' and donate regularly. None of this work could happen without you.

Three colour variants in Isle of Wight red squirrels. There are plenty more variations and even mixed colours!



Shows

We haven't been to many shows this year but help is promised for next year.

We have a red squirrel suit, so watch out for it at carnivals. This photo was taken at Appley Day.



2020 calendar



The new calendar has the theme 'expressions'. Have fun putting your own captions to the pictures! Calendars are £6.99 from the Red Squirrel hub or if you want one posted to you, ring Helen on 01983 611003.



Sad loss of staunch supporter Mrs Thomson

Mrs Thompson of The Largesse, Alum Bay, has for many years raised funds for Wight Squirrel Project. Sadly she passed away earlier this year and our condolences go to her family.

Mr Thompson is carrying on the fundraising at The Largesse, so if you are in the Alum Bay area, do visit the garden. We cannot carry on with our work without the support of people like the Thompsons.



White Tailed Eagle & buzzards

Quite rightly, a lot of people are concerned about the introduction of White Tailed Eagles to the Isle of Wight. Helen is dubious about the re-introduction, although it's very unlikely they will have a significant impact on red squirrels. As species are under stress thanks to human activities, a top predator is not going to help our wildlife. Farmers are also very concerned as the birds take lambs.

Eyewitness reports of buzzards taking red squirrels are still coming in and one gentleman took this picture of a tail from a freshly caught red squirrel. It seems this is all the buzzard leaves. It's nature but not at all helpful to the red squirrel cause!



Squirrel only feeders

Mike Evans has been busy making squirrel feeders to a design formulated over many years. The idea is to provide a feeder which is not too deep and easily accessible to young squirrels as well as adults. Feed should be renewed every few days so having a large feeder where the food stays there for days building up bacteria is definitely bad.

If you are having trouble with rats getting the food, then try suspending the feeder from a plastic covered wire. The squirrels are agile enough to reach the food but the rats are not.



Squirrels can manage without a ledge, so don't put the feeder where a handy branch provides a platform for large birds or rats.

Please support the charity by buying our squirrel feeders. We - and therefore the squirrels - do not get any support from others who sell feeders.

See our t-shirts and bags on Teemill

Buy a t-shirt, bag or hoodie from our store on Teemill to help us raise funds and show your support for red squirrels on the Isle of Wight.

Follow the link at the bottom of the first page on our website: www.wightsquirrels.co.uk



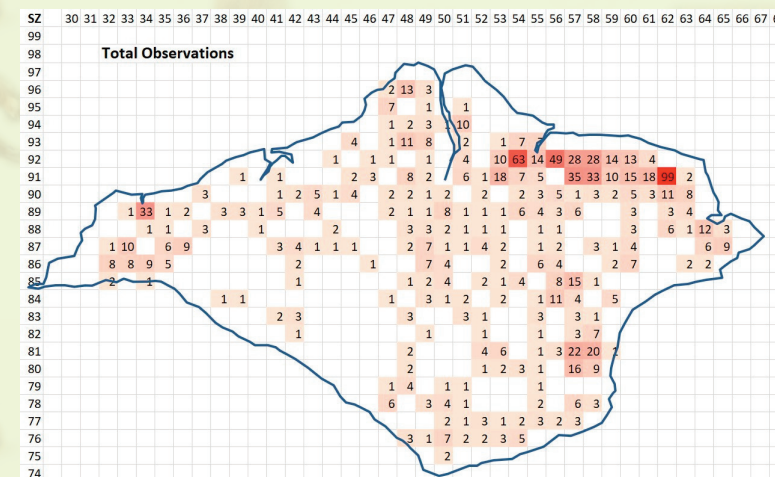
Bluebell Day

Thanks go once again to Nicky and Iain for hosting Bluebell Day in their beautiful Knighton woods. Ann and Hazel raised £49 for Wight Squirrel Project by selling refreshments. Gate money went to partner charity The IOW Red Squirrel Trust.



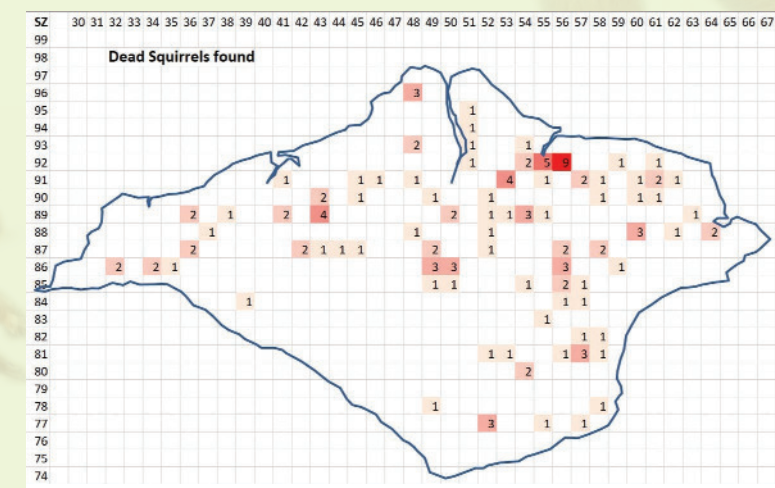
Citizen Science results and an app

Thanks to Ian Rennie, we have a map this year and a different set of breakdowns. If you think you can fill in some of the blank grid reference squares, please let us know. We need your help to monitor squirrels without stressing them. Also, if you send to other groups we do not get the information.



The total observations map shows YOUR sightings and does not include the bi-annual monitoring results

If you are interested in becoming a woodland monitor please contact Helen using the details at the bottom of the pages



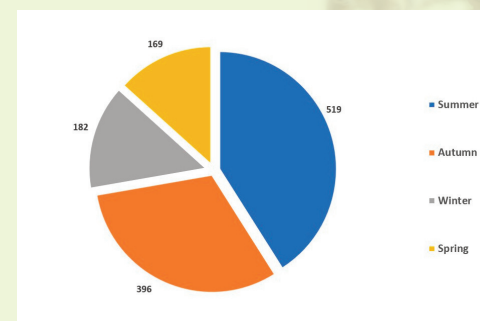
Map showing where YOU reported seeing dead squirrels. We could not get this information without your help

Habitat and corridor survey

Most of the groundwork is done now, however, mapping and writing the project up will take time. It was far more encouraging than when Helen first looked at corridors in 1992. The JIGSAW tree planting scheme has certainly helped improve vital wildlife highways to join up our fragmented woodland. There are still some places that would benefit from better hedgerows but overall the picture is pretty good.

Be careful with rat poison!

Every year I put this message in the newsletter but still get reports of bait put down incorrectly and squirrels dying in agony of rat poison. PLEASE DO NOT put bait in the open, it is so obvious! It must go into a special bait box and put in a dark tunnel, preferably underground. It's still not 100% certain a squirrel won't find it but it's the best anyone can do.



Pie chart shows sightings by season

It was a surprise that most sightings came in during the summer until I remembered the shows. This is where most sightings are recorded as we actively ask for sightings. It is very easy to report a sighting. Either visit the Red Squirrel Information Hub in Ryde High Street, email, use the website online form or phone. Contact details below. For on the go observations, those who have a mobile phone can download our new app. This is how to do it:

Loading Wight Squirrel Project Observations mobile App:

1. From your App Store search for 'Epicollect5'.
2. Get Epicollect5.
3. Install Epicollect5
4. Once installed (30 seconds) Open the App..
5. Tap + Add Project and search Wight Squirrel Observations.
6. Tap Wight Squirrel Observations and then + Add entry.
7. Allow location services for this app.
8. If you are not at the same location as the squirrel when entering the record please note where you are in the comments field.
9. After answering the questions then close and upload the data and image.
10. Look for another squirrel!!