



Save our Squirrels News

A Red Alert North England Project

This e-newsletter is designed to keep Partners and Stakeholders in the Save our Squirrels Project in touch with latest news and project developments. Please pass it on to anyone you think might be interested in what we've been up to, but equally if you do not wish to receive this update regularly in the future, please let our Information & Support Officer, Chris Westerback, know by e.mail (Christine.westerback@northwt.org.uk).

Reds Get Royal Seal of Approval

The project received a significant boost to both morale and finances in October 2007, when His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales made a substantial five-figure donation to Save our Squirrels. The Prince is passionately concerned about the plight of the red squirrel, and has made this donation as a pledge of his support for the project. We hope to be able to take The Prince to some of our key reserves over the next 18 months, so he can see the nature of the work his donation is supporting.

New Patron for Save our Squirrels

Lord Inglewood, Patron of Red Alert North England, has been joined by Robin Page, the well-known countryman, broadcaster and journalist. Founder of the Countryside Restoration Trust, Robin is a strong supporter of the red squirrel and an important public voice in the red-grey debate. We were delighted that he agreed to join us as Patron, and have already benefited from this in terms of project recognition in his regular contributions to newspapers such as the Daily Telegraph. We look forward to working closely with him in the future.

Red Squirrel Week 2007

Red Squirrel Week ran from 30th September to 7th October and was a great success in terms of media coverage of the project and public participation in red squirrel events across the country. In Northumberland, Phil Mitchell worked with over 1000 school children, whilst Mark Wilkinson led walks and talks at Kielder. In Cumbria, Lottie Widgery and Simon O'Hare had a packed programme of walks and talks during the week; and Sefton's partners worked with Sally Orritt and Fi Whitfield on walks, events and activities that culminated in the Big Draw event at National Trust, Formby Point.

Red Squirrel Week this year (2008) will run from the 4th to the 12th of October – and will be even bigger and better than before. An initial programme of events for all areas will be sent with the next issue of Project News.

Capital Projects

The new squirrel trail at Lifeboat Road, Formby was officially opened during Red Squirrel Week. Sally Orritt, our Sefton People & Wildlife Officer, has been working incredibly hard over the last year to deliver this first capital project for Save our Squirrels. The trail includes new interpretation boards, footpaths, feeding stations, listening posts, and artwork, and Sally has been working closely with pupils from Range High School and a local Guide Pack in its development. Unfortunately, the trail hit the front page in June for all the wrong reasons when two of the squirrel art pieces produced by acclaimed sculptor John Merrill were stolen! It's fairly clear that they have been stolen to order, and steps have been taken to ensure the remaining piece is protected from a similar fate. Discussions are now underway as to how best to replace these unique items.

Plans for the second new interpretation centre and trail, at Whinlatter Forest Park in Cumbria, are well underway, with a planned opening date of Easter 2008. Lottie Widgery, our People and Wildlife Officer for Cumbria and North Yorkshire, is working closely with the Forestry

Commission team at Whinlatter to create an innovative visitor experience that will be co-located with the RSPB's existing Osprey display. This will be complemented by a new outdoor trail with feeding stations, interpretation, and web cam links to both the centre and our website.

In Northumberland, Phil Mitchell (our People and Wildlife Officer for the county) has started the planning phase of the final capital project which will see the creation of a new red squirrel education centre and trail at Kielder Castle. The biggest of all the capital projects, Kielder has a scheduled opening date of Easter 2009, but web cams within the Forest are planned for installation in 2008 which will allow visitors to Leaplish Water Park (and our website) to watch the antics of our furry friends before that.

New Project Post

Partners and stakeholders will be aware that the initial project remit did not give us scope to undertake any grey squirrel control apart from advice and support to landowners and managers, and the ability to run workshops in trapping and control techniques. After discussions with the Heritage Lottery Fund, we gained their approval that SoS could undertake active grey squirrel control as long as we raised the funds to do so outside the project, and did not count them as match funding. We have been sufficiently successful in this, through grant applications and the generosity of a number of individuals, to be able to fund a new post of Grey Squirrel Control Officer for the remainder of the project.

The new officer will be working with landowners and local squirrel groups covering the area between the A69 and the Scottish Border, from the M6 to the edge of Spadeadam Forest. This post will effectively protect the western flank and southern flank of the Kielder complex from grey squirrel incursion, whilst ensuring that seropositive greys no longer cross the border into Scotland and threaten Kielder from the North. The post has been advertised (with extensive media interest), and we hope to make an appointment in January.

Grey Squirrel Control in Northumberland

In July 2006, The Red Squirrel Protection Partnership made a successful Rural Enterprise Scheme application to DEFRA for £150,000 to undertake grey squirrel control over 3 years in the North East of England. Save our Squirrels has a good working relationship with their two trapping coordinators and their administrator, immediately passing on all sightings we have of grey squirrels in the county so they can arrange trapping.

So What Have We Done With The Money So Far?

- Dealt with over 9000 enquiries from members of the public
- Taken over 2700 sightings of grey and red squirrels through the new hotline and website, as well as by post: Chris is now taking around 50 new sightings a week
- Over 7000 cleansed and verified records from both Cumbria and Northumberland, dating back to at least 2004, now added to new database
- Involved over 200 volunteers in conservation activities, over 528 days at a value of £28,000 to the project
- Taken 367 pupils and students to reserves, and established 7 Champion Schools
- Engaged 45 community organisations in active red squirrel conservation, and given talks to 59 local community groups
- Trained 88 volunteers in survey and monitoring techniques
- Contacted 291 tourism businesses and 30 Tourist Information Centres
- Produced 81 press releases and news features
- Achieved 113 press/TV/radio interviews – and stimulated a lot more column inches on the grey-red debate

Red Squirrel and Project Images

The Project now has a good library of red squirrel images, as well as pictures of our conservation and education work. If you want access to any of these, for use within your organisation or with partners and stakeholders to illustrate your organisation's role in Save our Squirrels, let us know your requirements and we'll try to meet your need.

If you would like more information about all aspects of red squirrel ecology and conservation; are interested in our education packs (from Foundation to Key Stage 3); or just want an update on project news, visit our website www.saveoursquirrels.org.uk. You can also buy some nice squirrelly related items there at the same time – all merchandise profits go towards grey control!

