

UK Squirrel Accord Newsletter

June

Introduction

A significant part of the Squirrel Accord document asks for “*simple and effective communication between parties to enable constructive partnership working*”. It also highlights the need “*for a transparent and open approach and the willingness to share information and a positive pragmatic attitude to (support) the efforts of others.*” This newsletter, the new Facebook page and Twitter feed, as well as the new improved website, will attempt to address the above two important aims. There will also be a website forum where discussion can take place on key issues. To provide consistency and clarity the monthly newsletter will be structured under the following headings.

- Public awareness and education
- Landowner and local group engagement
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- Co-ordination and communication
- Research and development.

A. Public awareness and education

Project plan

The project plan consists of a 12 month media strategy. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter will be used to support the aims of the project and ensure the 32 Accord signatories (in particular SSRS and RSNE) have a voice within the public consciousness. The website will also be used to make the public aware of our key initiatives and to carefully manage difficult messages (such as the necessity for culling as part of nature conservation). This will be implemented at no cost by Newcastle Business School.

In order to ensure the relevance of the website, any forthcoming campaigns should be forwarded to Adrian.Vass@squirrelaccord.uk and these can be placed upon the above sites. Similarly, if any members of the Accord Signatories would like to help set up a working group under this heading then please use above email address.

B. Landowner and local group engagement.

RSNE Project Advisory Group May Meeting Carlisle

The RSNE advisor Katy Cook presented a paper entitled ‘People Power’ which will be downloadable on our website soon. In brief this highlighted the work of volunteer groups:

- It was a case that 9 Northumbrian Groups reported 95 active members
- The Cumbrian groups reported 385 active members
- Their research showed that in establishing new groups the following factors affected their success:
 - Very difficult when no desire expressed from the community
 - More successful if a local champion makes an initial approach
 - Presence of a professional ranger / sub contractor in new areas helps volunteers feel confident and supported.

- In terms of Data Submission. The RSNE have seen:
 - Dramatic improvement between 2011 to 2014 of over 1500%
 - In 2014 there were 1282 individuals reporting and completing documentation
 - Using the RSNE website there was a high in 2012 of 725 individual sightings of squirrels and in 2014 there was a drop to 650. (Northumberland (1450) received the highest sightings with Cumbria (1390) a close second, Merseyside a long way behind (350) and Co. Durham; Tyne & Wear and North Yorkshire less than 200
- In terms of Grey Squirrel Control Compilation and mapping of 2014 grey squirrel control is now complete.
- Summary data can be seen below in the context of historic information held in the RSNE database. It shows the effectiveness once volunteer groups are established.

Year	RSNE team ONLY			NONE RSNE			TOTAL		
	Grey kills	Trap days	Shoot days	Grey kills	Trap days	Shoot days	Grey kills	Trap days	Shoot days
2011	426	4537	80	2075	8745	219	2501	13,282	299
2012	2994	49,798	629	7833	43,708	370	10,827	93,506	999
2013	2729	47,523	1375	6843	54,053	1964	9572	101,576	3339
2014	4063	44,712	1630	9755	63,197	2975	13818	107,909	4605

Tetrads in which conservation effort was recorded

Year	RSNE team	Everyone else	TOTAL
2011	48	81	129
2012	246	465	644
2013	240	577	735
2014	240	651	806

RSPB Festival of Spring Musselburgh Race Course 23 – 24 May Scotland

- This is a two-day event which is organised by RSPB. The event includes the Scottish Birdfair, Levenhall Links by the Firth of Forth and famous Musselburgh Racecourse.
- The site is a premier birding hotspot managed by East Lothian Council, and is widely recognised as one of the best places in the country for birdwatching. Scotland's Big Nature Festival is now in its fourth year and is expected to attract some 6,000 bird and wildlife lovers from across the UK and beyond.
- I met the following: Jonathan Hughes CEO SWT; Steve Callaghan Asst Director National Trust for Scotland; Mel Tonkin project manager SSRS; Ken Neil & Steve Willis & Lorna Hutchinson of SSRS; To meet yet is Paul McDonald the Project Officer for Argyll, The Trossachs and Stirling.
- Anne McCall RSPB Regional Director South & West was the MC for the proceedings.
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Lancashire, Manchester & North Mersey Wildlife Trust: Meeting with Fiona Whitfield (Conservation Officer) and Rachel Miller (Red Squirrel Conservation Officer)

- Discussion of the new English agri-environment scheme and the key issues relating to red squirrel conservation

- Many of the partners of RSNE (of which L,M,NMWT are) have been involved with DEFRA/NE/FC consultations over the summer associated with the development of the new English agri-environment scheme which replaces Forestry Commission's woodland grant schemes from next year.
- Although development work is coming to an end it appears red squirrels are still under consideration as a species which the scheme can choose to help. Draft target statements for north-east, Cumbria and the Yorkshire Dales suggest applicants may be able to apply to help red squirrels across red squirrel range, not just in the designated "strongholds".
- The new scheme replaces all historic forestry and agricultural land management schemes and new applicants will have to deliver a whole range of objectives.

Meeting with Red Alert - Formby & Scarisbrick Squirrel Group

- Discussed the key aim to ensure local groups work purposefully towards a common aim of grey squirrel control.
- The group are already being very strategic in how they control grey squirrels and are flexible enough to modify their trapping programme on a regular basis.
- Rachel Miller plays a role in coordinating the owners and the volunteer and contracted trapping & shooting groups in each of the woodlands.
- Group as a whole organised with a clear vision moving forward.

C. Co-ordination and communication.

FAQs and website development

- The target date for the launch of the Accord website is the 1 July, will be the Manager's main channel of communication with the wider squirrel campaign community as well as a source of processed and available information.
- The website will be focused around linking squirrel community sites together, concentrating on organizations rather than individuals
- The site will contain no personal contact details to ensure both data and personal protection.
- The website will become a source of valuable information, building and developing over time through contributions by Accord members. It will be as simple and easy to use as possible
- As part of the website, a monthly Accord members' newsletter following the RFS model will be available online to communicate information and requests.
- There will be a "Frequently Asked Questions" area for the public on the desktop to which the committee will contribute and which will grow over time with input from the wider membership. RFS has experience in this area and animal rights sites will be examined to make sure that factual information is available in areas of public concern.
- Twitter and other social media feeds will be incorporated into the site.

Messages

- It is agreed that the Manager will develop key messages for public consumption and a briefing paper for Accord members.
- Consideration will be given to placing an abbreviated version of the key messages on the website, with less supporting detail than the members' paper.
- The Manager will circulate this work to committee members for comment.

Autumn meeting

- In order to ensure and develop positive relationships there will be a for Accord members in London in early October.
- Presentations by the Manager and other members will be accompanied by discussion and ministers will be invited to speak and meet members.

D. Research and development

Vaccine

- There is some concern that the immunization research at Moredun has come to a halt and a plan is being developed to find a way forward.

Kielder Raptor Research and Pine Marten

- Over the last two decade Kielder forest has been the location of many research projects; notably with Aberdeen University. Xavier Lambin (Professor of Ecology) and Dr Emma Sheehy (Research Fellow of The School of Biological Sciences) gave an update on their research for the last 50 years.
- Xavier has been involved with vole and raptor research in Kielder for over a decade specifically - the predator prey interaction.
- Emma's research has involved interactions between Pine Marten populations and effects on Grey Squirrels, initially in southern Ireland and presently in Aberdeenshire. She is currently developing research proposals to further scientifically assess the potential for an expanding Pine Marten population to control Grey squirrels and aid in the conservation of the Red Squirrel in mainland Britain.
- There has been a request from Xavier and Emma to locate two sites in the North of England to develop the Pine Marten project further. It is unclear whether the Pine Marten will have a role in the control of grey squirrels in England and Scotland. If Xavier and Emma can find a squirrel group to manage the project in Northern England then this will be a good opportunity to build on the Emma's Irish work on the Pine Marten

Forthcoming visits.

- FC Scotland to meet Brendan Callaghan (Head of Delivery & Regions and one of the founders of the RSNE project)
- FCE: Rebecca Isted - Vulnerability Index for the project plan
- The National Forest Company – Simon West to discuss the Accord Project Plan. The National Forest in central England is set to become a charity, in a bid to access extra funding. More than eight million trees have been planted on the 200-sq-mile (518-sq-km) site, in Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Staffordshire, since 1995. That includes the RFS' Battram Wood. The NF Company, which runs the project, said it would become a charitable company as part of a 10-year plan to "secure its future". More detail on this story can be found at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-28673500>)
- South West England: Confor Event 24 June Grey Squirrel Management Day.