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Summer Newsletter



Red Squirrels in the UK.

Adrian Vass the UK Squirrel Accord Manager. Sets out his understanding of how he finds things in the UK Squirrel world.



The story of squirrels (so far) in the UK

We are two distinctly separate areas

After one year of activity the Accord has identified that a nationwide and coordinated landscape approach to red squirrel conservation and woodland management is absolutely vital to red squirrel conservation. We also have to tell the British public the cost of the damage caused by uncontrolled grey squirrel growth.

This means that every landowner and volunteer group / NGO has to play a vital and responsible role in red squirrel conservation and woodland management. This is not intended to undermine the stronghold strategy of setting up of priority areas for red squirrel conservation in Scotland. and thus targeting limited Forestry Commission (Scotland), Scotland's Rural Development Programme EU funds.



The challenges of red squirrel conservation and grey squirrel control are very different but one can split the UK into two areas: Red Squirrel United Kingdom (N. Ireland) Britain and Grey Squirrel Britain:

Red Squirrel Britain. Red Squirrel Britain is made up of 120,000 red squirrels in Central Scotland (between the Scottish Borders and Highland Fault Line), 15,000 red squirrels in Northern England, and 5000 red squirrels spread between Mid & Northern Wales and Northern Ireland. There are nearly 2.5 m grey squirrels in the UK.

The real asset is the 120,000 population of Scottish red squirrels and the biggest threat is the damage that could be done to them by unchecked grey squirrels moving up from Pox ridden Grey Squirrel Britain into Northern England (where there are 15,000 red squirrels) and then moving up through the Scottish Borders into the Central Lowlands.

Grey squirrels are blind to landholding and national boundaries. The Scottish Government Agencies and NGO's understand the need to be part of a holistic approach to grey squirrel control across the whole of the UK.

The Accord strategy is to support the Save Scotland's Red Squirrels HLF project of developing and increasing community development in grey squirrel control and pox virus management in the Central Lowlands and, as far as possible, slowing down (preferably stopping) the Northern migration of the species.

Grey Squirrel Britain. Grey Squirrel Britain is made up of an area below the Leeds to Manchester M62 highway. This is the home of the English grey squirrel and it is found there in large numbers. Woodland owners

have a virtually impossible job of controlling grey squirrels and if it is not done through a landscape approach then woodlands that are not controlled become 'grey squirrel reserves'.

The new Countryside Stewardship will be helpful for grey squirrel control if woodland landowners and their agents can access the grants with the Accord supporting the work. It is here that the real damage of grey squirrels is done as they target broadleaf trees aged between 10 – 40 years. The English Vulnerability Mapping Index programme will highlight those woods that are at risk because of the age of planting, proximity to mature woodland & ancient woodland and urban settlements. The Accord will be developing a widespread programme of PR and information letting the British public know of the damage caused by grey squirrels to trees, homes and the native red squirrels. There are few red squirrels in this area and where they are present they are located in zoos and red squirrel enclosures. The RSST (The Red Squirrel Survival Trust) has a strategy to increase public awareness and education by developing red squirrel enclosures and introducing zoo enclosures through a joint branding programme. This is aimed in part at alleviating some of the anxiety that a strong grey squirrel control will bring in Grey Squirrel Britain.

It is becoming clearer that a strategy is needed to bring Grey Squirrel Britain under control. We are told that the annual economic cost to Woodland owners is now more than £17m. In terms of biodiversity the real cost may be much greater due to the increase in plant disease spread by grey squirrels through ring barking of their target tree at base and canopy level.

A direct consequence of this is that land owners (the Forestry Commission are aware) are deliberately not planting broad leaf woodland which will have a serious economic and environmental impact on what Britain looks like at the turn of this century – a landscape virtually denuded of traditional British trees.

The Future: An approach will soon be available that will blend the opportunities of the fertility control vaccine, a new communication system for live trapping, the soon to be available "Good Nature A24 kill trap" and the development of a new trapping management strategy from GWCT. This will mean that the woodland owner and the community squirrel volunteer will have new tools to add their own expensive shooting programmes and the new BASC low-cost bait shooting approach. We are actively looking at how we can improve our communications with the various bodies throughout the UK who are working, sometimes in isolation, on this campaign. Sharing information is vital to the success of our work.

The Accord's aim is to establish a network of red squirrel enclaves in Grey Squirrel Britain. To achieve this, we have to use all of the resources available to us to eradicate the grey squirrels and constantly monitor to ensure they do not re colonise these sensitive areas. These enclaves will be open to the public and will have an enormously beneficial impact on tourism, witness the Loch Garten site in Scotland where the osprey and red squirrels attract huge numbers of paying visitors. Before we can unveil our plans publicly, we have to change the British public's mind-set on the grey squirrel and we will shortly be announcing more details of this.

“The National Wildlife Management Centre at the Animal & Plant Health Agency has been involved for over a decade in exploring wildlife fertility control as an additional tool for mitigating human wildlife conflicts” highlight Dr. Dave Cowan & Dr. Giovanna Massei

Managing humanwildlife conflicts.

By Giovanna Massei and Dave Cowan

National Wildlife Management Centre, Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA)

Current trends of human population growth and landscape development, coupled with increased numbers and widened distribution of several wildlife species, indicate that humanwildlife conflicts will continue to grow worldwide. This is particularly evident in Europe, where a relatively high density of human settlements coincides with expanding populations of wildlife.

Humanwildlife conflicts, often associated with wildlife populations considered locally overabundant, can involve transmission of diseases, economic impact caused by damage to infrastructures, private and public property, forestry and crops, vehicle and aircraft collisions and environmental impact on plant and animal species. Conflicts associated with recent, dramatic increases of several non-native species are of particular concern in many European countries. Traditionally, the economic and environmental impacts of wildlife have been managed by lethal methods. However, public opposition to culling is growing because of concerns about animal welfare, human safety particularly in urban settings, negative environmental effects of toxicants and the potential for culling to exacerbate some issues such as movements of animals outside their normal range. This growing antipathy towards lethal methods places increasing constraints on the options available to manage wildlife, particularly for high profile, iconic species. Consequently, there has been growing interest in alternative approaches such as translocation and fertility control. In many instances, the debate about methods of managing humanwildlife conflicts is polarised, with stakeholder groups disagreeing about the evidence or misinterpreting the science. For instance, translocations are often advocated as a humane method to resolve

problems caused by wildlife. However, lessons learnt from translocations of wildlife suggest that this method may cause significant stress, increase mortality, is relatively expensive and has the potential to spread diseases and pathogens. Among nonlethal methods to manage wildlife, fertility control has potential as a safe, humane and effective means of reducing population growth and local numbers. The market for human contraceptives and a growing public interest in alternatives to surgical sterilisation for companion animals and livestock have fostered investment in the development of novel fertility control agents.

Human-wildlife conflicts are increasing



- Damage to crops, forestry, property
- Disease transmission
- Impact on native species
- Road traffic accidents
- Livestock predation



The National Wildlife Management Centre at the Animal & Plant Health Agency has been involved for over a decade in exploring wildlife fertility control as an additional tool for mitigating human wildlife conflicts. Among the wide range of mitigation methods and techniques now available, practical applications of fertility control have recently emerged and have been successfully implemented at local scale. Examples of populations managed through fertility control include feral goats, deer, freelifving horses, elephants, kangaroos and possums. Many aspects of the technology in terms of contraceptive compounds, delivery methods, knowledge about the impact of fertility control on populations are maturing and being used in a wider range of species and contexts. We consider that fertility control, sometimes in conjunction with traditional methods to manage wildlife, has increasing potential to resolve a wide spectrum of humanwildlife conflicts in a humane, effective and sustainable way.

Fertility control applications

Wild boar: 1 dose GonaCon stopped reproduction in 92% sows for 5-8 years



Feral goats: 1 dose GonaCon reduced fertility by 83-92% for ≥ 4 years

California ground squirrels: 1 dose GonaCon reduced the % of lactating females by 91% (year 1) and 96% (year 2)



2018
Annual
Plan
Health
Agency

*“Dr. Cathleen Thomas
of the Royal Society of
Wild Life Trusts’
newly appointed
Manager for the Red
Squirrel United
Project briefs the
Accord on their HLF
& Life project.*

The Red Squirrel United Project.



The Red Squirrels United project aims to safeguard the future of the red squirrel in England, Wales and Northern Ireland by:

Providing the first ever national programme of red squirrel conservation learning and celebration.

With four annual knowledge fairs, giving 500 attendees from across the UK opportunities to showcase their conservation experiences, hear from each other, digest the latest science, form new working relationships and set joint plans for new activity

Three best practice guides showcasing red squirrel conservation success and highlighting successful techniques/approaches to achieve impact

Joint communications planning (including with Scottish partners] to build public awareness of red squirrel viewing opportunities and support for conservation efforts across the UK

Improving red squirrel conservation impact to maximise sustainability

Shared conservation methodologies and monitoring protocols to ensure transferable learning and impact assessment across the local projects

Independent and rapid mathematical modelling of all project data, providing local projects with speedy feedback to improve their conservation work

Published and peer-reviewed journal articles influencing the design of invasive species management projects and underpinning policy across the UK and Europe

Preventing new colonisation/introduction of grey squirrels

Successful prevention of grey squirrel re-colonisation on Anglesey

Increased presence of red squirrels in Gwynedd, Twyi Forest and Clocaenog

Efficient grey squirrel control and early warning systems to protect Kielder woodlands

New grey squirrel eradication zone established in the Mourne Mountains and reduced numbers of grey squirrels in the Newry/Newcastle headland in Northern Ireland

Sustained red squirrel populations in North Merseyside and West Lancashire, Kielder woodlands and the Glens of Antrim

Build local community awareness and involvement to avoid biodiversity loss

Community Engagement Officers appointed in Wales, North Merseyside and West Lancashire and Northern Ireland to raise awareness and establish new community-based rapid response teams

Recruit 1250 volunteers by delivering at least 80 workshops and talks for community volunteers and teams across the project area to build skills in squirrel monitoring, grey squirrel management and awareness raising

-Engage over 4000 people by delivering at least 200 public engagement activities (including school activities) including red squirrel viewing, use of the arts, encouraging red squirrels into gardens and mass participation squirrel monitoring

UK-wide communications plan implemented

Explore the impact of the red squirrel on local communities and economy

Audit of tourism business use of red squirrels in product promotion in at least one case study area

Networking activities to engage individual tourism businesses and scope potential contribution to local conservation efforts

The Red Squirrel United Project is jointly funded by Life and The Heritage Lottery Fund



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