

UKSA fertility control update

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Thank you for your continued support for the UK Squirrel Accord (UKSA). A key focus of our work is the grey squirrel oral contraceptive research funded by signatories to and supporters of UKSA.

The impact of Covid-19 has been to extend the time needed to complete the research objectives for year three of our five-year programme to September 2021.

During year three we are trialling three different oral contraceptive candidates and will choose the best to take forward for further research into years four and five. Two of these are vaccines and one is a cholesterol inhibitor.

We are planning field trials to test and refine the species specificity of the feeder that will ultimately deliver the oral contraceptive. We are also conducting trials to measure the average amount of bait consumed by grey squirrels in woods.



Field trials on the feeding hopper © APHA

Managing grey squirrels is important for both red squirrel conservation and broadleaf tree health. Their introduction to the UK has directly caused local extinctions of red squirrel populations and their bark stripping activity weakens, stresses and kills important tree species.

Our oral contraceptive research aims to provide an effective, non-lethal, less labour intensive management tool to protect the UK's red squirrels and trees. Do support this important work by donating via our website: www.squirrelaccord.uk/donate

Thank you



Grey squirrel bark stripping – evidence, consultation, event

In the UK, the introduced grey squirrel is classed as an invasive non-native species. This is partly due to its negative impacts on red squirrel populations. Importantly it is also because of the serious bark stripping damage it inflicts on broadleaf tree species.

Bark stripping activity is highest between April and July every year. Large areas of protective bark can be stripped from trees, leaving the vulnerable inner layer exposed to infection by pests and pathogens. Trees are most at risk between 10 and 40 years of age.

With an increased focus on tree planting, we must consider the protection they need to grow healthily to provide important ecosystem benefits.

Evidence

This is a key time for damage to occur and the subsequent impacts to weaken, stress and, if severe, kill trees. We are gathering evidence to highlight the issue and help understand the breadth of the problem.

UKSA is putting a call out for images or video footage of grey squirrels actively bark stripping or the visible damage to trees and woods following this activity.

If you have images or videos you are willing to share please email small files to info@squirrelaccord.uk or transfer large files to us via www.wetransfer.com. Do let us know when the evidence was taken, a rough geographical location and if you wish to be credited.

Consultation

Defra are currently consulting on a [new Tree Strategy](#) for England. The final document will set out national forestry policy through to 2050 and replace the Government's 2013 [Forestry Policy Statement](#). The deadline for responses is 11 September 2020.

This will be a wide-ranging strategy and your views are sought on activities and solutions to expand and connect trees and woods, protect and improve them, engage people and support the economy.

Along with deer, grey squirrel damage is highlighted as a concern for tree health and woodland condition. Question 30 of the consultation specifically asks for views on a variety of actions to reduce grey squirrel numbers and includes mention of the UKSA-funded oral contraceptive research.

Online awareness event

The UK's first National Plant Health Week was postponed in April due to Covid-19 and has been rescheduled to 19-27 September 2020.

UKSA is organising an online seminar to raise awareness of the issue of grey squirrel bark stripping, share management advice and guidance, and allow questions to be posed to a panel of experts.

If you wish to join the event on 23 September 2020, please email info@squirrelaccord.uk with your interest.



Grey squirrel bark stripping on beech in North Wales

Red squirrel national strategies/plans

Scotland and Wales already have existing red squirrel strategies they are continuing delivery. UKSA is supporting work on the following:

England is currently developing a red squirrel action plan. Progress had been delayed, the plan is currently being drafted using expert input from land managers and other practitioners, academics, researchers and civil servants.

Northern Ireland is developing a red squirrel strategy. However, a key seminar was postponed due to Covid-19. This will hopefully take place later this year and include various experts and key individuals.

Case studies

The UKSA Knowledge Exchange and Woodland Management Subcommittee is currently working to create case studies to share via the [resources library](#) section of the UKSA website. These will help disseminate useful information and can be used for public awareness raising and communications work.

We are looking for examples of best practice, lessons learnt and issues to tackle around red squirrel conservation, grey squirrel management and impacts on tree health from bark stripping.

If you have an example of a good case study you would be willing to work with us to create and share, please contact info@squirrelaccord.uk with your suggestions – thank you.



Red Squirrels United report



The Wildlife Trusts successful Red Squirrels United (RSU) ended in March this year. A four-year, multi-partnership programme focused on nine project areas across England, Northern Ireland and Wales, it was funded by EU LIFE and the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

As always, the RSU annual Knowledge Fair early this year was well attended and as enlightening as always. These positive community-building and knowledge-sharing events are among many highlights of the programme. Here are some other key achievements:

- RSU generated £11.5 million of benefits to red squirrel conservation
- Red squirrel populations are stable or increasing in project areas
- Eight red squirrel groups were created or revitalised
- Volunteers contributed over 44,000 hours - worth £865,000
- Over 700 training and community events engaged 50,000+ people
- Successful red squirrel reintroductions took place in Silent Valley, Northern Ireland and Clocaenog, North Wales

Other accomplishments can be read in the full overview online [here](#).



Knowledge Fair site visit © Holly Peak



Squirrel sightings in Scotland

So far this year over [6,000 squirrel sightings](#) have been reported to Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels (SSRS) of both red and grey squirrels.

Since 2009, SSRS has been working to restore red squirrels in Aberdeen – the only place in northern Scotland with an established grey squirrel population. Working with dedicated volunteers, SSRS has been monitoring and removing grey squirrels from the area, which resulted in increasing numbers of red squirrels returning each year.

However, growing reports of grey squirrels moving north risk the safety of red squirrel populations in wider Aberdeenshire. North East Conservation Officer, Emma Sheehy, warned: “These new sightings show that grey squirrels are appearing further north into Kincardineshire than they have in recent years. We need the public to help us by continuing to report sightings.

“Without targeted action, these squirrels could continue to spread north, and become established in Kincardineshire and beyond. That could begin to undo the hard-won successes we’ve achieved in the in the last ten years.” Please report all Scottish squirrel sightings [here](#).

Reporting squirrel sightings

Covid-19 saw a reduction in the ability of volunteers, land managers and organisations to manage grey squirrels at a key time of year for them spreading to new territories. However, work in many areas is being reinvigorated using government advice and guidelines for health and safety. Here are some useful links to enable you to support red squirrel conservation and protect tree health by reporting squirrel sightings:

Scotland - [Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels](#)

Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland - [All-Ireland Squirrel and Pine Marten Survey](#)

Northern England - [Red Squirrels Northern England](#)

North Wales - [Red Squirrels Trust Wales](#)

Mid Wales - [Mid Wales Red Squirrel Partnership](#)

Local groups in England, Northern Ireland and Wales - [Northern Red Squirrels](#)

Pine marten research in Northern Ireland

The [All-Ireland Squirrel and Pine Marten Survey 2019](#) was published earlier this month by experts from the National University of Ireland Galway, Vincent Wildlife Trust and Ulster Wildlife.

The 2019 survey was conducted across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Over 3,400 records were submitted, a large increase from previous surveys, which showed the distribution and status of native red squirrels and pine martens, and invasive grey squirrels.

Since the 2007 and 2012 surveys, grey squirrel records decreased in number and range, with the report saying they have now functionally disappeared from County Fermanagh, Co. Monaghan and parts of Co. Meath and Co. Kildare.

Red squirrel and pine marten sightings increased over the same period. The report states, "there is evidence of the negative correlation between the grey squirrel and pine marten, and it is in the areas where the pine marten has increased most significantly that this squirrel has disappeared."

However, there is evidence of grey squirrels spreading into the southwest of the island. They are also still shown to be thriving in some locations, particularly urban areas of Belfast and Dublin. This demonstrates that active management by humans is still needed.



Queen's University of Belfast

Also published this month was a [research paper](#) in the British Ecological Society journal. Researchers from Queen's University of Belfast focused on the issue of urban areas acting as refuges for grey squirrels.

Using modelling techniques they showed that, despite the gradual recovery of pine martens being linked to grey squirrel declines in woodland, grey squirrels are likely to persist in urban areas. They highlight the need for human-led control of grey squirrels in urban sites.

They also suggest that, "sustainable recovery of both the red squirrel and the pine marten across the wider landscapes of Ireland, Scotland and Northern England seems probable, while in Southern England and Wales, although possible, chances are more remote". Other methods remain vital for grey squirrel management.