

Squirrel Surveying 2006/2007

Two volunteers started surveying squirrels in Kyloe Woods during 2006.



After some initial training they were asked to trial a new method of monitoring squirrels which involved baiting a 1km transect with mixed bait, sunflower seeds, peanuts and whole maize kernels. If the maize germ is eaten then squirrels are present.

Did baiting make squirrels easier to monitor? The final report from Dr Lurz of Newcastle University said that it certainly did.

During 2007, the group had grown to five volunteers. Now working with squirrel officer Philippa Mitchell and conservation officer Mark Wilkinson of Save Our Squirrels (SoS), the largest single-species conservation project taking place in the UK at present. SoS was created by Red Alert North England in 2006 to deliver the North of England Red Squirrel Strategy, but is managed and directed by Northumberland Wildlife Trust.

Kyloe, Detchant and Sheillow Woods were combined to create a dedicated Red Squirrel Reserve, the only reserve in our area with the next being in Kielder Forest.

After further training it was decided to use a technique of visual monitoring and cone transect counting to survey six fixed transects in the Kyloe, Detchant and Sheillow Woods, two in each wood. Records of visual sightings, squirrel evidence and tree species were made.

Throughout 2007 there were problems. Extreme weather, flooding of transects and time allowance disrupted the surveying programme. This is a reality of wildlife surveying.

The volunteers learned a huge amount, especially in squirrel signs and tree identification. This will help us during the 2008 survey season.

But you have to wonder about the sanity of the volunteers. In two years of surveying they have not actually seen a single red squirrel during a survey. So why do they do it? Simple, they are passionate about saving our native red squirrels.

Elizabeth, February 2008