



SAVE OUR SQUIRRELS

A RED ALERT NORTH ENGLAND PROJECT

c/o Northumberland Wildlife Trust

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Red and Grey Squirrel Interface Surveys

Background

The red squirrel is the only species of squirrel native to Great Britain. Its future survival is threatened by the spread of the non-native grey squirrel. Grey squirrels, which were introduced from North America, out-compete reds for food and resources. Grey squirrels also carry and transmit the squirrelpox virus – a virus that is lethal to reds but harmless to greys. When grey squirrels move into new areas, red squirrel populations soon suffer.

16 large conifer forests in the North of England have been designated as 'Red Squirrel Reserves'. These forests give red squirrels an advantage over greys due to the small seeds produced by conifer trees. Red squirrels survive adequately on these seeds, but they provide a very poor diet for the larger grey squirrel. Each of these reserves is surrounded by a 5km 'buffer zone', where grey control is targeted to stop grey squirrels reaching the reserves.

It is critical that we monitor the buffer zones, and key 'incursion routes' which allow grey squirrels to access these areas.

Interface Surveys

Interface surveys provide a straightforward and accessible approach to surveying, which will quickly provide us with this important information on red and grey squirrel distribution. The surveys aim to establish presence/absence of squirrels by recording sightings of red and grey squirrels, as well as any evidence of squirrels such as feeding remains or dreys.

There are several key areas in Northumberland where we would like to see surveys conducted. Surveys are usually focused on areas where there is specific risk from grey squirrels, such as likely dispersal routes or new areas where greys have been sighted. The SoS Conservation Officer can work with you to find you a suitable area to survey, that also suits you.

Alternatively, it is useful to gain information on squirrel distribution from all areas of Northumberland, so if you prefer you can conduct surveys around the area where you live, or somewhere that you regularly enjoy walking.

Either way, the SoS Conservation Officer will provide you with a map of the selected area to help record survey results.

Surveys should be focused along public footpaths and rights of way to avoid access issues.

Conducting a survey

Once a woodland or route has been selected to survey, aim to conduct the survey early in the morning as squirrels are most active at this time. The survey should be postponed if weather conditions are unsuitable – squirrels are much less active during heavy rain, high winds, and very cold spells.

When you reach the survey location, please complete the details at the top of the 'survey record form' as accurately as possible. Aim to walk at least 1km through the woodlands to ensure a reasonable area is covered.



You should conduct the survey by walking slowly along the chosen route. As you walk, watch for signs of movement on the ground as well as in the tree tops. Sightings are often just a quick glimpse of a squirrel as it moves through the trees. Consult the attached squirrel identification sheet to make sure you can distinguish between red and grey squirrels – this is not necessarily as simple as it sounds, as you can't always tell from the colour. Record the number of red and/or grey squirrels that you see on the survey record form. You can also mark the locations of sightings on the survey map; use 'R' for a red squirrel and 'G' for a grey squirrel.

As well as looking for the squirrels themselves, you should also look for evidence of squirrels. The attached sheet will help you to identify the remains of conifer cones that squirrels have fed on, and help you to spot a squirrels 'drey' (nest). Record presence of squirrel evidence on the survey record form. You can also mark the locations of any squirrel evidence on the survey map; using 'F' for feeding signs and 'D' for dreys.

If you would like to add any additional notes, please record these on the survey form and mark numbers on the survey map to show where the notes refer to.

It is helpful if you can repeat the survey 2 or 3 times over a two week period. This will help to ensure the survey is representative of squirrel activity in the area.

Once you have completed your surveys, please return the completed survey map and form to the SoS Conservation Officer, along with you volunteer time sheet.