

Scottish Squirrel Group
Wednesday 24th January 2007
Quality Station Hotel, Perth

Final minutes

Present:

Mairi Cole, (Chair) (SNH)
Ian Collier, (Secretariat) (FCS and Highland Red Squirrel Group)
Mel Tonkin, Scottish Squirrel Survey Co-ordinator
Gavin Skipper, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, Red Squirrel Working Group
Liz Poulson, Forest Research
Brian Tasker, Dundee City Ranger
Janie Steele, North Argyll Squirrel Group
John Massey, Cowal Red Squirrel Group
Juliet Robinson, Red Squirrels in the Highlands
Ann-Marie MacMaster, Red Squirrels in South Scotland
Stuart Brookes, Scottish Wildlife Trust
Paul Gallagher, Scottish Wildlife Trust
Ranald Strachan, Fife Squirrel Group
Shona Munro, Ayrshire Red Squirrel Group
Jamie Farquhar, ConFor
Abbie Patterson, National Trust for Scotland
Cecilia Rogers, Grampian Squirrel Group
Ken Neil, Dundee City Ranger
Marina Smith, West Argyll Squirrel Group
Richard Wales, Red Squirrels in South Scotland
Gordon Patterson, Forestry Commission Scotland
Penny Johnston, SSPCA
Emma Strong, Student with NTS

Apologies:

Brenda Mayle, Forest Research
Karen Pickles, Ayrshire Red Squirrel Group
Andy Wiseman, European Squirrel Initiative
Graham Christer, Angus Squirrel Group
Jay Burkinshaw, Perth & Kinross Squirrel Group
Chris Waddell, Stirlingshire and Clackmananshire Squirrel Group
James Pringle, Border Squirrel Management Group
Mike Libera, Crown Estates – representing Red Alert South West Scotland

1. Welcome and introductions

The group welcomed Richard Wales from Red Squirrels in South Scotland, John Massey representing the newly formed Cowal Red Squirrel Group, Ken Neil from the Dundee group, Marina Smith representing the West Argyll area, Celia Rogers representing the Grampian Squirrel Group and Penny Johnston from the SSPCA..

2. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

Action points from March 2005:

AP8: MC to find out further details regarding Non Native Group:

This group is being led by ERAD. The GB strategy will be put out to consultation in February. SWT will be commenting and kindly offered to send the draft through IC to the SSG to help with comments that any individual/group would like to make.
discharged

AP12: MC to invite Richard Pow to next meeting: *Ongoing*

Action Points from September 2005:

AP4: MC to invite UKRSG up to a future next SSG meeting: *Ongoing*

AP17: MC to send out questionnaire on funding needs to local groups: *superseded, SWT to action, ongoing*

Action Points from May 06 meeting:

AP 6: MT to send IC copy of Squirrelpox virus note for circulation to members:
discharged

AP 6(a): MT to circulate use of volunteer's policy and procedures: *discharged*

Action Points from September 2006 meeting

AP 1: BM to contact Alice Holt Seed Branch: *discharged* A concept note has been drafted with approx. cost of £8,000

AP 2: *discharged*. Brenda has obtained a copy of the MSc report by Laura Davis 2006 'A Comparative Dietary Analysis of Pine Martens (Martes martes) in Scotland, with reference to Squirrel predation (see Research Update) Results do not show strong evidence of Marten predation of squirrels.

AP 3: MC to take agreement of annual workshop with RSCO attending, to UKRSG, *discharged*

AP 4: MC to take conference details to UKRSG: *discharged*

AP5: BM to supply reporting sheet in DEFRA grey squirrel control project to members of the SSG: *ongoing*

Matters arising

Warfarin

The FCS asked the SSG for their view on any revisions that they see are required to the use of Warfarin.

The following points were considered:

- The label approval is only for reasons of tree protection
- The use of the red squirrel friendly hopper was seen as a good way forward for using Warfarin in areas where red squirrels had not been recorded but where there was an outside possibility of them being present within a 10km square.
- Warfarin has a targeted impact when used to reduce damage to timber. It has not been tried or cleared for use in attempting to control populations of grey squirrels to benefit red squirrels.
- There are gaps in our knowledge about the impacts of using Warfarin.
- There are anecdotal reports of shrews that appear to have been poisoned by Warfarin, as they eat maize that has fallen out of the hopper when inadvertently pulled out by the grey squirrel.
- There appears from 1990's research by Forest Research (unpublished data) to be a very low risk of killing red squirrels when using warfarin, (even less than the risk of red squirrel deaths when trapping grey squirrels.)
- SSPCA expressed concern about welfare issues when using Warfarin

A vote was taken and the following recommendations were agreed:

1. Assuming scientists agree with the Forest Research work, all geographic restrictions on the use of warfarin could be removed in favour of using the selective hopper (to exclude access by red squirrels) in all areas. Results of this would have to be monitored in buffer areas where red squirrels may be most exposed to ensure that the hoppers afforded sufficient protection.
2. If there were still concerns about the hopper research, no changes should be made to the current warfarin map. Members did not favour revising the map on a case by case basis.

AP 1 MC to take above recommendation to the next UKRSG meeting on the 8th February 2007.

Guidance notes

The FCS have produced a guidance note 'Forest Operations and red squirrels in Scottish Forests – the law and good practice' .

AP 2 IC to send link to SSG

This guidance note is designed as interim guidance and will be subject to any improvements and refinements required in the light of experience and comments during 2007. It is anticipated that a revision may be issued in the autumn 2007.

AP 3: All: If anybody has any comments or case studies please send to IC and he will then send on to GP

3. Membership of SSG

It was agreed that membership should remain as per the circulation list for now but be subject to review as the group develops. As Red Squirrel Conservation Officers become employed the group may become too unwieldy. In time, there may be a need for separate local group meeting and a more policy based meeting.

Membership of the group should exist of representatives from key organisations as agreed by the group. One representative from each Local Group will be welcome. (unless there is a specific need or interest expressed by the group to have additional members present).

As regards circulation list, the names on the list have the responsibility to forward items of interest to group members.

AP 4: IC to send copy of minutes to north England contacts

4. Local Squirrel Group updates

See Local updates attached.

5. Establishing and monitoring red squirrel populations

See Mel Tonkin's summary attached. One area of concern is that South Lanarkshire is poorly represented.

6. Prioritising Woods where conservation work will be focused

Gordon Patterson gave a summary of the potential stronghold area selection process.

In preparing the Action Plan, the Priority Woodlands were used by the working group together with other information on designated sites and broad-leaved and native woodland to identify potential stronghold woodlands.

The selection of potential strongholds have been proposed in the Action Plan on the following basis:

- Defensibility against grey incursion
- Geographical spread

- Large area of woodland
- Woodland contains squirrels already

These strongholds would be managed principally for red squirrel conservation and this could require restriction or removal of large seeded BL trees in parts of the stronghold and buffer areas. The strongholds should now be agreed by March 2008 and management plans drawn up for these areas thereafter.

One method proposed to progress this is through a project officer employed by FCS/SNH to agree the strongholds and perhaps aid development of the management plans thereafter. Attempts would be made to avoid high conflict areas (clashes with other high priority species/habitats) when selecting strongholds

The remaining revised 'Priority Woodlands' list, (revised through information from the National Survey), would represent areas where habitat management for red squirrels would be important. There would not be any presumption against large seeded broad-leaves and grey squirrel control would not necessarily be supported by public funds: see annex 6 of the Red Squirrel Action Plan for the precise wording.

AP 4 FCS and SNH will circulate information on the stronghold selection project when it gets underway.

Concern was raised by the group that management of the stronghold areas would require funding and there would be an associated loss of importance for the Priority Woodlands. This concern was noted although MC noted that SNH had made a significant investment in identifying priority woodlands and would be seeking ways of continuing to support these if possible.

7. Improving woodlands for red squirrels

No points raised

8. Minimise or reduce threat from grey squirrels – Squirrelpox virus – update and action

The two Grey Squirrel Control Officers (GSCOs) are in place until March 2007. An application is in place to SNH seeking funding for a full year after end of March.

Concern was expressed by some members of the group that insufficient resources have been allocated in the Action Plan to effectively control grey squirrels. Individual groups are advised to raise this issue with the Minister's office if they have concerns.

General concern was aired that pest control companies were not dispatching grey squirrels as per the law but trapping them and releasing them elsewhere (an illegal operation).

AP5: MC to contact Pest Controllers organisation to clarify the law and to pursue the issue of the trap manufacturers including a notification of the legality about releasing grey squirrels when selling traps.

There was an agreement that more effort was required to control grey squirrels in Cumbria as this is the source of grey squirrels moving up into south Scotland.

AP6: MC to take this concern to the UKRSG

AP7: MC to request detailed map of GB Squirrelpox cases to date from the UKRSG.

AP8: MT to send Squirrelpox distribution papers to all.

9. Research into red squirrel conservation – update

See update from Brenda Mayle attached.

10. Implement the strategy locally with central support – local group support

It is anticipated that the Action Plan will fund the new Red Squirrel Conservation Officer posts throughout Scotland. The job description will focus on continuing the red squirrel survey strategy.

11. Promoting the strategy and raising awareness of red squirrel conservation

The Scotsman newspaper will be featuring the Scottish Squirrel Survey in March and will encourage readers to send in squirrel records.

12. Monitor and assess progress of the plan - local groups views

No points raised

13. Scottish Squirrel Survey (Conference) Forum update

See draft plans attached. It is hoped that the JNCC monitoring survey will be in circulation by the date of forum.

AP 9: Mel to send electronic version to IC for distribution

14. UKRSG update

An update will be given at the next meeting.

15. AOB

The Advocates for Animals and SSPCA have expressed concern regarding welfare issues involved in controlling grey squirrels during the breeding season. SNH are to build a case to justify the guidance in place.

16. DONM

Tuesday 4th September 2007 at Roslin.

Ian Collier

28th March 2007