

Scottish Squirrel Group

Tuesday 10th March 2009

**Forest Research
Northern Research Station
Roslin**

Final minutes

Present:

Mairi Cole, (Chair) (SNH)
Ian Collier, (Secretariat) (FCS and Highland Red Squirrel Group)
Juliet Robinson, Red Squirrels in the Highlands
Andy Wiseman, European Squirrel Initiative
Ken Neil, Tayside Squirrel Officer
Abbie Patterson, National Trust for Scotland
Celia Rogers, Grampian Squirrel Group
Jamie Farquhar, ConFor
James Pringle, Scottish Rural Property and Business Association
Gavin Skipper, Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, Red Squirrel Working Group, Also representing Cowal Group
John Massey, Cowal Red Squirrel Group
Johanna Willi, Fife Red Squirrel Group

Apologies:

Mel Tonkin, Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels
Brian Tasker, Dundee City Ranger
Karen Pickles, Ayrshire Red Squirrel Group
Richard Wales, Red Squirrels in South Scotland
Sian Williams, Ayrshire Red Squirrel Group
Brenda Mayle, Forest Research
Stephanie Meyer- Gleaves, Red Squirrels in South Scotland
Jay Birkinshaw, Perth and Kinross Squirrel Group
Paul Gallagher, Scottish Wildlife Trust
James Downie, Trossachs and Loch Lomond National Park, Red Squirrel Working Group
Paddy and Loiuise Garthwaite, Perth & Kinross Squirrel Group
Graham Christer, Angus Squirrel Group
Mike Libera, Crown Estates – representing Red Alert South West Scotland
Stephen Willis, Grampian Squirrel Group

1. Welcome and introductions

Johanna Willi from the Fife Red Squirrel Group was welcomed to the group.

2. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

Action Points from September 2005:

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

Non – Native Group

AP 3: MC to check with Angela Robinson regarding the position of grey squirrel within this group: *ongoing*: limited success, contact will be made with Hugh Dignon. *Discharged*.

AP 2: JM will circulate a report on the use of rope bridges: as yet this is not in the public domain: *discharged*

Action Points from September 2008 meeting

AP1 All: To pass comments on the future structure of the group to IC who will circulate to all group members in preparation for agreeing way forward at the next meeting in March: *Discharged*

AP2 IC: to send out Terms of Reference of the SSG to stimulate thoughts/comments: *Discharged*

AP3: All local group reps to send written updates to IC for inclusion with the minutes: *Discharged*

AP4 RW: to send synopsis of RSSS project to IC for circulation: *Discharged*

AP5 MC: to check with the Aberdeen Ring Road planning dept to assess possibility of including early trapping of greys to the south of Aberdeen: *Ongoing*.

AP5 All: to double-check and update via BM this valuable research summary: *Discharged*

AP6 All: suggestions of names and logo's to MT ASAP: *Discharged*

Matters arising

It was accepted that the new agenda format was easier to deal with and the minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising would be dealt with towards the end of the agenda.

3. Local Squirrel Group updates

RSSS

Recruitment on to the SRDP is going very well. 22 proposals were committed for the February RPAC and another 37 are being prepared for the June assessment round. Additional recruitment is ongoing.

Traps continue to go out under the RSSS trap loan scheme as do blood sampling kits.

To date there are no new positives in areas outside the established pox/seropositive range.

The Pox outbreak at Queensberry seems to have been contained and there have been no new cases reported/discovered.

The “positive” grey from Holybush in Ayrshire appears to have been another false result. Over 50 blood samples were submitted and analysed from the immediate area and all returned a negative result. The work of the FCS control officer was invaluable – it could not have been done without him. Sampling continues, but on a greatly reduced basis.

Highland

A LEADER application has been submitted to hopefully secure funding for Red Squirrel Conservation in the Highlands over the next three years.

The FCS Guidance Note 33 continues to be used when carrying out tree felling operations.

An award ceremony is being arranged for the surveyors at Eden Court Theatre Inverness next week. This event will recognise the valuable contribution from surveyors in the Highlands.

Highland were glad to be more involved with SRPBA and looked forward to involving Crispian Cook in their activities.

Trossachs and Loch Lomond National Park, Red Squirrel Working Group

The Biodiversity Action Plan is due to be launched on March 18th. The plan contains many strands relating to squirrels namely: public awareness, surveying priority areas, squirrelpox virus checking, habitat management, road casualties. A pine martin survey is to be carried out. A rope bridge study has been completed. A map has been compiled showing the road casualty locations and this is being used to demonstrate the need for siting of road signs or rope bridges.

Greys are not being controlled by FCS or park staff.

Tayside

Ken Neil is now officially the RSCO for the SSRS in this area. His main priority at this time is to contact people /communities to highlight the SSRS grey control programme. He has made contact with BASC and the Scottish Gamekeepers Association. (SGA)

Fife Red Squirrel Group

Johanna's post is currently funded by EU and Fife Council and is due to come to an end this September. Funding for extension of the post will be sought. At the moment, the main area of work is taking place in Devilla and Ladybank woods where a grey control strategy is to start soon.

Ayrshire Red Squirrel Group

To be circulated separately

Grampian

A letter explaining how to use squirrel traps correctly is vital when allocating traps. It is hoped that the SSRS post will be advertised soon.

A new type of post trap for gardens will be adopted by the Grampian Group. For further details please contact CR.

Other updates

NTS

The NTS has a wealth of data from surveys done on their properties over the last 9 years. It is hoped that a paper on the surveys can be produced.

ESI

The importance of baseline monitoring of squirrel populations was stressed. This data is important to assess the impact of any grey control being done in a given area.

SRPBA (Scottish Rural Property and Business Association)

The Red Squirrel Survival Pack was highlighted.

AP 1: JP will circulate the details to the SSG.

Confor

As the SRDP is now under review it was suggested that the "Targeted Areas" within the SRDP be clarified and the SSG should lend its weight to clearly identifying the location of these special areas. It was raised that the grey squirrel control strategy areas will supersede current wording and will identify areas within the SRDP

The River Basin Management is out to consultation at the moment. This may be a good opportunity to raise the issue of the movement of greys along key riparian corridors. See the SEPA web site on www.sepa.org.uk

4. Future Structure and working of the SSG

It was agreed that the local group input is important as one of the key roles of the SSG is to “become the main forum for discussion of squirrel management, policy and practice in Scotland and to promote the exchange and dissemination of information.

The SSG has a forum and policy function which has to be retained. The suggestion was made that the agenda could identify the policy issues to be dealt with in the morning and the group update in the afternoon.

The question arose as to how big a workable group could be. It was agreed that 12 to 15 would be preferable.

A suggestion was made to disseminate local group updates through the year by “E-group”. This would allow on-going correspondence and updates between local groups with only outstanding issues being raised at the SSG. It was also suggested that an annual gathering through the SSRS would serve to get all groups together with the SSG meetings meeting covering only updates.

Any policy issues should be reported to the group throughout the year. An update and discussions if required can take place at the SSG meetings

It was suggested that the meeting should be timetabled to avoid lengthy debates on items resulting in other items being deferred.

4 options can be considered:

1. Status quo (continue current membership and meeting content);
2. Alternate meetings on policy and ‘sharing best practice’ (local group issues);
3. Focus SSG on policy discussions and rely on E-group and annual SSRS seminar to keep all up to date with local group activities;
4. Carry on with present SSG structure, set up an e-group for ongoing correspondence and hold annual SSRS seminars for local group co-ordination.

AP 2: All to consider the above options for next meeting.

5. Strongholds Woodlands update

IC handed out hard copies of the (confidential draft) consultation document.

SSG members were invited to make any comments to Jo Ellis within a week as the time line for sending is out is tight. Subject to ministerial approval the consultation will start at the end of March. Jo would like comments on the document at this stage. There will be plenty of opportunities to comment on the consultation itself that will last 12 weeks.

6. Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels update

To be sent as separate document

7. Research Update

The secretary apologised for not sending a copy out to the SSG. See Brenda Mayle's Research Update attached.

AP 3: IC to circulate Research Summary.

8. UKRSG update

The minutes have been placed on the UKRSG web site.

9. AOB

Grey control

Some groups (Highland and Trossachs/Loch Lomond et al) had received an FOI request about the issues of killing greys within the breeding season.

AP 4 : MC to provide SSG members with the response that they may like to use. Each group will respond in their own way with advice from SNH on the actual facts

SRDP

There was concern from the group that the rules when applying for SRDP applications appear to be unclear, particularly the conditions which are applied when moving control areas and the timing of payments which can be claimed. Clarification of the application process and overall rules is required.

AP 5: Local groups to contact their Case Officers

Grey Squirrel Control Strategy

MC informed the group that SNH had completed the Grey Squirrel Control Strategy previously discussed with the group and, subject to a couple of points of clarification, would be publishing this imminently. This would help inform locations for targeted control under SRDP.

Animal Welfare Report

MC informed the group that the report reviewing methods of humane killing of grey squirrels had been finalised and forwarded for publication. Copies would be provided to the group (at least a link to the website publication) when this was available.

10. DONM

2nd September 2009 SNH Battleby.

Ian Collier, 28th April 2009