

Scottish Squirrel Group

7th September 2005

**Forest Research
Northern Research Station
Roslin**

Final Minutes

Present:

Mairi Cole, (Chair) (SNH)
Ian Collier, (Secretariat) (FCS and Highland Red Squirrel Group)
Jamie Farquhar, Forestry & Timber Association
Elly Hamilton, Red Squirrels in South Scotland
Mel Tonkin, Scottish Squirrel Survey Co-ordinator
Karen Pickles, Ayrshire Red Squirrel Group
Gavin Skipper, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, Red Squirrel Working Group
Janie Steele, North Argyll Squirrel Group
Jay Burkinshaw, Perth & Kinross Squirrel Group
Brenda Mayle, Forest Research
John Wyman, Dundee City Ranger
Brian Tasker, Dundee City Ranger
Mike Libera, Crown Estates – representing Red Alert South West Scotland

Apologies:

Gavin Legge, Grampian Squirrel Group
Sue Hearn, Red Squirrels in South Scotland
James Pringle, Border Squirrel Management Group
Julian Warman, Scottish Wildlife Trust
Chris MacGregor Perth and Kinross Squirrel Group
Alan Ross, Angus Squirrel Group
Neil Cowie RSPB
Andy Wiseman, European Squirrel Initiative
Gus Jones, Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group
Abbie Patterson, National Trust for Scotland
Chris Waddell, Central Squirrel Group

1. Welcome and introductions

The group welcomed John Wyman and Brian Tasker who represent Dundee City Rangers. Jay Burkinshaw is now the rep for the Perth and Kinross Group on the SSG. (to replace Chris MacGregor)

2. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

Action points from March 2004:

AP3 Forest Research Report published. *Discharged.*

Action points from October 2004:

AP1 Shape files have been sent to SNH and FCS: *Discharged*

AP 2 Revision of BAP targets document to be circulated by IC: *Discharged*

AP 3 Grey control agreement: *Discharged*

AP4 Access/owner info on woods to be surveyed. Interested parties should approach their local Forestry Commission Office for this information. *Discharged*

AP5 Survey Steering Group: *Discharged*

AP7 Andy Wiseman has now agreed to be the ESI representative on the SSG:
Discharged

AP8 Comments on FTA proposals for future remit of group: *Discharged.*

AP9 Promotional material available from EH: *Discharged.*

AP10 Native Woodland Survey: *Discharged.*

AP11 Nature Conservation Act : *To be addressed at next meeting.*

Action points from March 2005:

AP1 'Bryce and Carmel' information note. Should be out by end of September 2005:*Discharged*

AP2 IC to circulate last UKRSG minutes. See UKRSG web site: *Discharged*

AP3 Elly to circulate advice note on grey trapping: *Discharged*

AP4 Local groups to send records to Mel: *Discharged*

AP5 IC to contact Gordon Paterson re Guidance Note on woodland management for red squirrels: *Ongoing*

AP6 MT to circulate bibliography of all literature available relating to red squirrels:
Ongoing

AP7 MC to circulate the outline support package for funding local groups: *Discharged*

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

AP9 IC to ascertain whether grey squirrel classed as a predator within the SFGS?
The answer is no:*Discharged*

AP10 IC to send out Red Squirrels and SFGS note: *Ongoing*

AP11 MC to identify baseline squirrel resource for the revised BAP: *Discharged*

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

3. Local Squirrel Group updates

Written reports were received from Highland, Ayrshire, Central Scotland Squirrel Group, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, Red Squirrel in South Scotland Project and National Trust for Scotland. These are attached to these minutes.

In addition to the written responses the following reports were verbally presented and in addition the following points were raised:

KB Perth and Kinross Red Squirrel Group.

The group have produced an attractive post card/recording form that can be posted back to the group with squirrel sightings.

The groups new website is www.redpages.org.uk

The group is pursuing a sponsorship with Dewars whisky of Aberfeldy. Membership is now 30 strong.

JS Argyll group

The group is still in the making and is not a formal group as such. Being over such a large geographical area there may be a geographical split into south and mid/north.

EH Red Squirrels in South Scotland

EH requested that group write to the Scottish Executive to request funding for research on the poxvirus. As the press coverage of the poxvirus has increased in recent weeks the request from external groups for funding is timely.

AP1 EH to circulate sample letter

AP2 All groups to write to SE ASAP

Following a discussion on who is doing what in the world of the poxvirus, the group recognised the need for a strategic look at what is being done with research work and work on the ground.

EH requested that there be a RSSS rep on the UKRSG.

AP3 MC to contact UKRSG regarding EH request.

AP4 MC to invite UKRSG up to our next SSG meeting. (A Joint SSG/UKRSG meeting at Battleby)

JW Dundee City Rangers

This group is undertaking 20 transect surveys using volunteers. Partnerships have been progressed with a local golf course and a hospital.

Funding has been secured to the tune of £27,500 from a Biodiversity Action Grant.

This has secured the employment of a full time red squirrel officer.

WIAT funding has been approved by the FCS and will contribute to a 3 year grey squirrel control programme.

Despite a local newspaper running the headline 'council cull grey squirrels' no adverse comments were received. It is encouraging that approx. 50 messages of support were received. This was down to an active public awareness campaign that has been in place over the last 2-3 years.

JW Angus Group is still active!

AP 5 MC to contact Chris MacGregor to ascertain the full picture.

It was noted that Argyll and South Lanarkshire have not yet achieved full group status.

AP 6 MT to contact potential key players in these areas.

ML Red Alert South West Scotland

ML said it was good to see the development of new local groups, as they have an important role to play in engaging the public and highlighting the plight of the red squirrel at a local level. This had been the case for RASWS, but he warned that experience had shown that it was difficult to maintain interest (over 10 years), with a purely voluntary group. However, despite interest waning of late, the early good work of the group was now paying dividends, with regular reports of sightings of red and grey squirrels, control of greys, and general support for measures aimed at protecting the red squirrel. The Project Officers for SW Scotland and the Borders are continuing with the work started by RASWS and BSMG, but with their attention focused on the Priority Woodlands initiative, it was important not to forget about the smaller woodlands that were likely to act as a conduit for greys, and where a lot of future grey control was likely to take place. Public awareness is currently high, with the PO's generating a lot of newsworthy publicity, but it is important not to give the impression that we have given up on outlying populations of red squirrels. As a possible solution to maintaining interest, he felt a solution might be to have a professional lead for local groups, perhaps FC Rangers, as with the success of bat groups, or Council Rangers, as some areas were fortunate to have.

IC Highland Red Squirrel Group

Observations on surveying from Ron Bury were presented. The issues of terrain, woodland structure, isolation and weather are all important factors when surveying particularly in the Highlands. It may be too much for volunteers to carry out the surveys required on a national level. He calls for the employment of paid surveyors.

4. UKRSG Update

IC summarised the last meeting that was held in Belfast.

AP 7 IC to check how final minutes are progressing and circulate when they are available.

AP 8 MC to book Battleby for the next SSG and invite UKRSG to attend as a joint SSG/UKRSG meeting

5. Grey Squirrel Control

No news update on Warfarin to date. A report is due out in November – December.

6. BAP target setting

The group agreed to leave the proposal as is. (please find attached) If further comments are received, then further discussions will take place with advice from BRIG.

7. Red Squirrel Conservation in Scotland Conference

After a group discussion (and written contribution from Stuart Barber) the following way forward for the conference was suggested:

The date will be in Jan/Feb 2007, held over two days at Battleby. It will aim for a strong local group input, set in a Scottish context rounding off Mels project.

AP 9 Mel to circulate a list of ideas and proposals for comment

8. Scottish Squirrel Survey/Co-ordinator update.

Following a request from some of groups, distribution maps showing pre 2001 data will soon be sent out by MT.

AP10 MT to issues new maps

MT expressed concern that it appears that not many new transects were being done by the local groups. Admittedly the surveys were very time consuming. There is clear need for a local survey co-ordinator and engage and lead surveyors. JF suggested that Geva Blackett who represents Invercauld estate would be a good contact for strengthening links with the Scottish Gamekeepers Association.

The two red squirrel survey leaflets are to be produced soon.

9. Draft Strategy for Surveying Squirrels in Scotland

Discussion from the floor suggested that Forestry Commission Rangers would be able to be pro-active in the co-ordination of volunteers on Forest Enterprise ground thus strengthening the link between FCS and local groups.

AP 11 IC to establish contacts in each Forest District and Conservancy.

AP 12 MC to contact FCS to explore the initial acceptance in principle from FCS

AP 13 All to comment on the draft survey strategy to MT by end of September

JF Are any of the transect surveys fundable through SFGS?

AP 14 IC to ascertain whether transect surveys are fundable through SFGS.

AP 15 All local groups to submit current squirrel records to Mel by end of October.

An addendum to the Priority Woodlands report is to be issued by SNH. The previous report inferred the grey squirrel was spreading out from Borders and Dumfries and Galloway. The amended version will emphasise the need for immediate action in Southern Scotland to protect the area against further spread of greys from the Central Belt and Northern England.

Guidance on implementation of the new Conservation Act is on the way from SNH/FCS

AP 15 MC to chase guidance note.

A new funding package from SNH for support of local squirrel groups is being sought internally by MC. The content and mechanism of administering this is currently being developed

The first step may be pilot schemes in selected area/areas.

AP16 MC to send out questionnaire to local groups.

Next meeting date:

7th March 2006 Battleby

6th September 2006 Roslin

Ian Collier

26th October 2005