

Anglesey mission for Norfolk's squirrels

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06 October 2006 09:53

Red squirrels from Norfolk could hold the key to keeping the species alive thanks to a project being set up on a Welsh island.

Red squirrels from the Pettitts animal park in Reedham and others from Banham Zoo are among dozens to be released into woodland on Anglesey.

Squirrels bred by the Norfolk Red Squirrel Captive Breeding Group are to be used in the conservation project, dubbed a modern-day Noah's Ark. It received £400,000 from GrantScape in July this year to restore red squirrels to the island.

The red squirrel, our only native squirrel species, is becoming endangered because of larger grey squirrels, which dominate woodland habitats and are involved in the spread of the squirrel pox virus. There are about 150,000 red squirrels in the UK and about 2.5 million grey squirrels, including tens of thousands in Norfolk.



Red squirrels bred in Norfolk are to be used in a project based on the Welsh island of Anglesey to increase populations of the species, which is declining dramatically.

Dr Craig Shuttleworth, leader of the Anglesey Red Squirrel Project, said: "Norfolk has been able to keep more of its red squirrels than other counties and has contributed more to the Anglesey project. Grey squirrels pass on disease to the reds, and this means that even a handful of grey squirrels pose a significant threat to red squirrel populations.

"Because Anglesey is an island it is possible to eradicate grey squirrels, whereas on the mainland, conservationists face reinvasion from grey squirrel populations."

Miles Barne, chairman of the European Squirrel Initiative, said: "American grey squirrels have displaced our much loved native red squirrel across most of England and Wales.

"Only in the north of England and in Scotland do significant numbers of red squirrels remain and these are likely to become extinct within 20 years unless the advance of the grey squirrel can be checked."

In June the Evening News reported how a Sprowston man was threatened with court after he caught some squirrels in his back garden and released them into the wild. Roy Hill was told by an RSPCA inspector he had broken the law by releasing the animals.

Information about the Anglesey red squirrel project can be found at www.redsquirrels.info

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