

Wales Squirrel Forum (4) 9th May 2006

Present

Michelle Bromley	Forestry Commission Wales (FCW)
Sarah Cartmel	Mid-Wales Red Squirrel Project (MWRSP)
Huw Denman	European Squirrel Initiative
Patrick Green	FCW – woodland officer
Liz Halliwell	Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)
Ben Isaac	WAG (Nature Conservation and Biodiversity Branch)
Hugh Knott	Menter Mon
Brenda Mayle	Forest Research (FR)
Judith Webb	Forest and Timber Association (FTA)

Chair	Liz Halliwell
Minutes	Michelle Bromley

1. Apologies

Chris Wynne	North Wales Wildlife Trust
David Cowley	Anglesey County Council

LH welcomed a new member, Ben Isaac of WAG (Nature Conservation and Biodiversity Branch). Dave Cowley has stood as LBAP representative and membership at meetings will now be shared between Kate Williamson (Snowdonia NPA) and Kate Burgess (Denbighshire CC).

2. Minutes of the last meeting

LH introduced the paper on Grey Squirrel trapping and the law. As a point of clarity – the purpose of trapping dictates who to approach regarding a licence. **Either** CCW (purpose - red squirrel conservation) **or** WAG (purpose - prevention of woodland damage).

3. Matters arising and action points

Action point 1

Forum to prepare a map showing existing and potential areas for red squirrel, including private land.

Action point carried over. It was suggested that this information be targeted at all development issues.

Action point 2

Forum to produce guidance for local authorities, land managers and developers to raise awareness of likely squirrel habitat, the potential impact of development and mitigation required.

Action point carried over. To be integrated into the Red Squirrel Recovery Strategy.

Woodland grants for squirrel management

PG explained that FCW had a new grant scheme 'Better Woodlands for Wales' (BWW) which replaces the existing 'Woodland Grant Scheme' (WGS). It is a whole property scheme requiring owners to prepare a management plan for all woodland on their property. Presently the scheme would contribute a 50% grant towards labour and hardware for appropriate and approved grey squirrel control measures. The FCW grey squirrel policy being developed may help to target those resources more effectively but that there would be no new money available.

There was general concern that 50% was inadequate and was the reason for poor uptake of the grey squirrel control part of the old WGS grant. There was general agreement that the FCW grey squirrel policy should spatially target collaborative control measures across woodland ownership.

WSF membership

LH explained the relationship between the Forum and the Partnership where each would have sight of agenda, papers and minutes. All agreed that good communication was the key and that individuals and representatives of organisations had responsibility to disseminate news and business from the Forum and Partnership.

The extension of Forum membership was discussed. LH reported that the RSPCA would like e-mail correspondence on Forum business. JW reported that Game Conservancy Trust (GCT) would like e-mail correspondence and that the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) would attend some meetings but would like e-mail correspondence for those it could not.

There was general agreement that the Wildlife Trust member be replaced by a Wales Environment Link nominated representative.

Action point 3

LH to discuss with Wildlife Trust member and contact Wales Environment Link for nominated representative.

LH to send membership update to UK Squirrel Group.

All other outstanding action points from WSF3 are to be covered in the agenda items.

4. Red Squirrel Recovery Plan.

LH presented a rough draft which is not for wider circulation at this point. There was discussion over the determination of priority sites and general agreement that:

- identifying priority sites was a big issue
- the use of the word 'priority' should be replaced by 'focal area'
- robust rationale and criteria need to be developed to define 'focal area' including activity level, population viability and dynamics, scale/spatial issues, strategic spread

- require ability to review focal areas with new evidence (ie. adding new verified populations and removing proven absences)

It was suggested that all verified red populations should be focal areas because in Wales the sites are so few. It was recognised that the identification of focal areas is linked to FCW grants, grey squirrel policy and the warfarin guidance and map review.

There were a number of specific points relating to the draft:

- 5.3.1 should refer to forest planning in public (Forest Design Plans) and private sector (BWW management plans and specialist assessments)
- 5.3.3 'aim' to eliminate and supplemented by FCW grey squirrel policy & BWW
- 5.5 advisory role needs to be 'smartened' with issues raised at UK Group. Web is important medium but to be inclusive require other mediums. Need to disseminate advice further than 'squirrel community'.
- 5.5.1 Links to Local Authority guidance, LBAP and Wales Biodiversity Partnership (WBP) Framework
- Research – collate existing body of evidence so easily accessible
- It was thought that the distinction between the Plan and implementation required more thought
- Squirrelpox virus – ensure adequate funding to control and increase understanding
- The use of the word 'recovery' was thought too optimistic and it was generally agreed it should be termed **Red Squirrel Conservation Plan**

Action point 4

*ALL to send comments to LH preferably as document tracked changes via e-mail by end of May L.Halliwell@ccw.gov.uk
LH to re-draft Red Squirrel Recovery Plan in light of Forum advice
LH, PG and MB to develop rationale and define criteria for selection of 'focal areas'*

The Forum questioned how this Plan would fit with Government Policy such as Non-Native Species and Wildlife Health and Disease. There was doubt over status - WAG/Wales or Defra/England or Defra/England & Wales.

Action point 5

BI & BM to liaise and BM to clarify status of Defra Animal & Wildlife Disease Strategy and feedback to Forum

5. Wales Red Squirrel Project.

SC introduced the scoping document proposing an all-Wales project for long term conservation of the red squirrel. The Forum discussed the pro's and con's of making an all-Wales application funding bid and agreed that there must be stronger evaluation of the idea.

Action point 6

ALL to send comments to LH/SC preferably as document tracked changes via e-mail by end of May L.Halliwell@ccw.gov.uk

Richard Pow of FC England has been invited to talk to the Wales Squirrel Partnership. Richard is coming to share with us his experiences from putting together the Save Our Squirrels project. The project, which is run by the Red Alert North England partnership, has just received c£600k HLF funding (see <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/newsrele.nsf/AllByUNID/B5211F7F7C1D209E8025714800336FA4> for further details).

Action point 7

*MB to organise meeting with Richard Pow. **PLEASE NOTE confirmed date Tuesday 18th July 2006 at Plas Dolerw, Newtown.***

Bl said that he had put together list of local funding sources for biodiversity and conservation projects that he was willing to share. It would eventually be published on the WBP website.

Action point 8

Bl to e-mail funding sources document to Forum members

6. Warfarin map review

It was explained that the FC guidance for use of warfarin and accompanying map was produced in 1974 and required update to remove odd distribution based on counties and the new Control of Pesticides Regulations (COPR). BM explained that FC GB was currently seeking legal advice on the update procedure re: PSD as competent authority. The Guidance and Map update would be done with Country advice and consultation but would be co-ordinated by FC GB.

BM explained that the new COPR required the use of selective access hoppers everywhere. There was general discussion about the need for buffer zones and the definition of criteria for woodland suitability for reds. Connected to this issue was discussion of a central repository for recording sightings, procedure for verification of presence and absence of reds and increasing awareness.

Action point 9

MB to feed Forum comments to FC GB

LH to revisit CCW project for squirrel database

LH to contact Emily Dicks re: increasing awareness & sightings reports

ALL invited to consider further and feed comments back to Forum

7. FCW Grey Squirrel Policy for Wales' woodlands – policy advice process

MB introduced the paper and explained that FCW were asking members of the Wales Squirrel Forum to provide expert advice to:

- Advise on the objectives and help define the outcomes of a FC Wales squirrel policy
- Consider the FC England Policy Statement and assess its applicability to Wales
- Suggest and advise on country level variations, specifics and/or new policy options for Wales
- Consider the 'critical threat' assessment guidance in England's policy statement, providing advice on spatial implications in Wales

There would be additional consultation with stakeholders through the Wales Squirrel Partnership, Woodland Strategy Advisory Panel and the wider Woodland Partnership.

Action point 10

MB to keep Forum updated on progress of FCW grey squirrel policy development

8. Research / monitoring update

BM updated the group on current research (research summary - refer to paper given out at the meeting).

Discussion focussed on the challenges facing reproductive inhibition as a control method for greys:

- Expectations, particularly those of the public, must be managed regarding this method which can limit population expansion but should not be billed as an alternative to lethal control methods. Research is showing that once grey populations have been reduced using lethal methods, populations can then be held at low densities using reproductive inhibition.
- There are major challenges in the 20 years+ of research to develop the method further. Selective access hoppers and bait types must be developed further to become more species specific. A single long term dose is under development.
- The Regulatory Framework requires consideration before use could become reality.
- More progress is expected in early 2007.

Action point 11

ALL to contribute other research areas to BM via e-mail brenda.mayle@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

9. Updates on red squirrel projects in Wales

HD and SC updated the group on the latest news. Of note:

In North Tywi 46 greys had been caught 14/46 had been tested for SPV and 13 of those 14 had tested positive. SC asked a question on behalf of the MWRSP regarding future support for the project. There are no obvious and immediate sources of funding, and a Wales red squirrel project may be the best longer term solution.

Anglesey is undergoing intensive trapping and expects 200 or less greys by end of 2006. There is concern over the shortage of reds in captive breeding programmes and the problems of an indeterminate virus which had caused mortalities at the reintroduction sites.

A hair tube programme at Cynwyd (FCW managed woodland) had confirmed red squirrel hairs. There was some discussion over hair tube methodology. SC explained that they were trying to develop moving tapes in the tubes which would allow an estimation of population size rather than just presence/probable absence.

10. Feedback on Scottish Squirrel Conference and UK Red Squirrel Group meeting

LH gave feedback to the group from the Scottish conference held in February 2006. Of particular note was a costed action plan for Red Squirrel in Scotland to be submitted by the end of May.

Next UK meeting on May 23rd.

11. Joint meeting with England Squirrel Forum?

The group had received an invitation from the England Squirrel Forum for a joint two day meeting to include field trip. It was thought to be a good idea to propose a meeting timed for September/October possibly in the Forest of Dean but that there was no commitment to be made at this stage.

Action point 12

<i>LH to respond to Fred Curry re: joint England / Wales SF</i>

12. Any other business

JW raised the recent Abbey National advert which had drawn criticism from some FTA members. Was this a possible source for commercial funding?

JW raised the issue of the recent trap advert in the Quarterly Journal of Forestry. The group discussed the humaneness of spring traps as a 'total lethal solution' and that should they be available to the general public as advertised there was an issue of child safety requiring awareness to be raised by the supplier.

13. Date of next meeting

Next Partnership meeting - **PLEASE NOTE confirmed date Tuesday 18th July 2006 at Plas Dolerw, Newtown.**

Next Forum meeting to be arranged re: point 11 above possibly joint two day meeting with England Squirrel Forum. September/October possibly in the Forest of Dean but that there was no commitment to be made at this stage.

Summary of action points

Action point	Who	By when
1 Forum to prepare a map showing existing and potential areas for red squirrel, including private land.	LH to lead All to contribute	?
2 Forum to produce guidance for local authorities, land managers and developers to raise awareness of likely squirrel habitat, the potential impact of development and mitigation required. To be integrated into the Red Squirrel Recovery Strategy.	LH to lead All to contribute	?
3 Review membership with Wildlife Trust member and contact Wales Environment Link for nominated representative. Send membership update to UK Squirrel Group.	LH LH	Before WSF5
4 Send comments to LH preferably as document tracked changes via e-mail Re-draft Red Squirrel Recovery Plan in light of Forum advice Develop rationale and define criteria for selection of 'focal areas'	ALL LH LH, PG & MB	End of May Before WSF5 Before WSF5
5 Liaise and clarify status of Defra Animal & Wildlife Disease Strategy and feed back to Forum	BI & BM	Before WSF5
6 Send comments to LH/SC preferably as document tracked changes via e-mail	ALL	End of May
7 Organise meeting with Richard Pow	MB	End of May
8 E-mail funding sources document to Forum members	BI	End of May
9 Feed Forum comments to FC GB Revisit CCW project for squirrel database Contact Emily Dicks re: increasing awareness & sightings reports Invitation to consider further and feed comments back to Forum	MB LH LH ALL	End of May Before WSF5 Before WSF5 Before WSF5
10 Keep Forum updated on progress of FCW grey squirrel policy development	MB	For WSF5

11 <i>Contribute other research areas to BM via e-mail</i>	ALL	Before WSF5
12 <i>Respond to Fred Curry re: joint England / Wales SF</i>	LH	End of May