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Last Updated: Thursday, 1 September 2005, 15:54 GMT 16:54 UK

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'Welsh squirrels' need new blood

The days of genuinely Welsh squirrels are numbered - but it is for their own good, according to scientists.



The days of pure Welsh squirrels are numbered

Experts in DNA techniques have found a unique bloodline on Anglesey but also that the local population is too in-bred.

To improve the situation squirrels from outside the area are needed to strengthen the bloodlines.

Despite this, the Anglesey Red Squirrel project is confident the population on the island will continue to grow.

"The population at Pentraeth are genuinely Welsh, with DNA which is unique to one area," said Hugh Knott, environmental project manager with Menter Môn, the Anglesey-based regeneration organisation backing the red squirrel projects.

"The population at Newborough on the other hand are made up of squirrels from all over the country which have been bought in.

"The hope is eventually that the two populations will meet up and breed, strengthening the bloodlines."

By learning more about the animals DNA experts can better identify individual animals and their movements.

"A squirrel was run over in Brynsiencyn recently and was traced back to Pentraeth via a small tattoo which is given to all red squirrels which are caught.



The red squirrel is only found in three areas of Wales

"We think it could have found it's way to Newborough where it would have bred with the population there."

The DNA testing is part of an ongoing squirrel project set up to save the dwindling population.

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- RELATED INTERNET LINKS:**
- Red Squirrel Action Plan
 - The Wildlife Trusts
 - Countryside Council for Wales
 - Forestry Commission Wales
 - Menter Môn
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Last year over 20 young - called kittens - were born in the Newborough area on the western side of Anglesey.

Figures for this year are not yet available, but the hope is that it will have been another successful breeding season.

Overall numbers are in serious decline. In Wales, there are just a few sites where red squirrel live - in Gwynedd, Clwyd, and central Wales.

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