

Mid Wales Red Squirrel Project – Red Squirrel Species Action Plan

Introduction and Vision Statement

The red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*) is Britain's only native squirrel. It has experienced a severe decline in recent times, linked to the spread of the grey squirrel, which was introduced to Britain from North America in the late nineteenth century. Grey squirrels are better able to utilise food resources in broadleaved woodland and tend to displace red squirrels from such habitats within about 15 years of their arrival and also are host to the deadly squirrelpox virus. Consequently the red squirrel has now disappeared from most of southern Britain.



In Wales the red squirrel is now mainly confined to a small number of large conifer plantations, where it feeds on a variety of seeds, fruits, buds, shoot tips, bark and lichen. In contrast grey squirrels are less well adapted to feeding in conifer forests, which can allow red squirrels to persist in such habitats. However, pockets of large-seeded broadleaves within conifer forests can support populations of grey squirrels, constituting an ongoing threat to any resident reds.

Although once much more widespread in Carmarthenshire, recent red squirrel sightings are now sporadic and highly localised to the mid Wales conifer forests. Most post-2000 records have come from Bryn Arau Duon (north of Pumsaint) and several privately and publicly managed conifer blocks in north Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Powys. Recent survey work suggests that red squirrel population density is low but widespread throughout the forests; grey squirrels are also present. The population in mid Wales is the most genetically diverse in Wales.

Private and public forest managers have to work in tandem for conservation of the red squirrel to be effective. The Mid Wales Red Squirrel Partnership is working hard to find as much as possible about the status of the red squirrel in mid Wales and to focus action within all relevant organisations to ensure the conservation and enhancement of this iconic species in mid Wales.

Any vision for red squirrels would include a priority for future management and an objective of all forest design plans of the retention/enhancement of suitable habitat within the mid-Wales forests. The development of a landscape-scale conservation strategy for mid Wales could include measures for red conservation and grey control in the forest and buffer zones.

Action Plan Objectives

RS1SP To maintain and increase the population of red squirrels in mid Wales.

RS2DCM To gather data on the distribution and status of red squirrels in the mid Wales.

RS3RA To raise awareness of the importance of the red squirrel population in mid Wales and provide advice on habitat management.

RS4POL To ensure that red squirrel conservation issues (including grey control) incorporated in all relevant plans and policies that affect the mid Wales forests.

ACTIONS

CODE	TEXT	START/END DATE	CONTACTS (lead in bold)
RS1SP1	Implement biosecurity measures to minimise the risk of disease transmission from activities such as trapping and supplementary feeding	Ongoing	MWRSP
RS1SP2	Set up a pilot project in a discrete area of the red squirrel Focal Site buffer zone to investigate the feasibility of grey squirrel control	2010–2012	MWRSP
RS2DCM1	Identify a practical survey and monitoring methodology for red squirrels in the Mid Wales Red Squirrel Focal Site	2010–2011	MWRSP, FCW
RS4DCM2	Identify and implement a practical survey and monitoring methodology for grey squirrels in the Mid Wales Focal Site	2010–2011	MWRSP, FCW
RS2DCM3	Implement the survey and monitoring identified in RS2DCM1	2010–2019	MWRSP, FCW
RS2DCM4	Identify key habitat areas for red squirrels together with arboreal connective corridors and ensure integration into current and future Forest Design Plans throughout the Mid Wales Red Squirrel Focal Site	2010–2011	MWRSP, FCW, Private forest managers
RS2DCM5	Monitor incidence of squirrelpox virus in grey squirrels using blood sample results obtained from trapped grey squirrels.	Ongoing	MWRSP
RS2DCM6	Collect hair samples from trapped red squirrels for further genetic analysis	Ongoing	MWRSP
RS2DCM7	Provide opportunities for a range of red and grey squirrel research projects.	Ongoing	MWRSP, FCW, CCW, landowners

RS2DCM8	Disseminate research and survey findings in order to enhance the understanding of red squirrel ecology	Ongoing	MWRSP, FCW, CCW
RS2DCM9	Produce a revised records map for mid Wales project area annually	2010–ongoing	MWRSP
RS2DCM10	Undertake targeted survey/monitoring for RS within the Mid Wales RS focal area – as funding allows	2010–ongoing	MWRSP
RS3RA1	Share good practice and establish good communications with other red squirrel projects	Ongoing	MWRSP, WSF
RS3RA2	Provide red squirrel conservation advice to all woodland owners, managers, foresters, local authorities and other appropriate bodies	Ongoing	MWRSP, FCW, WTSWW, CCW, Coed Cymru
RS3RA3	Establish a red squirrel community/volunteer group within the MWRSP area	Ongoing	MWRSP
RS3RA4	Promote public understanding about the red squirrel and its conservation in mid Wales – walks, talks, PRs, newsletter	Ongoing	MWRSP, FCW, WTSWW, CCW, Coed Cymru, LBAPs
RS3RA5	Maintain interactive and informative mid-Wales Red Squirrel Project website pages on WWBIC website	Ongoing	MWRSP, WWBIC
RS4POL1	Produce and implement a grey squirrel control strategy for the Mid Wales Red Squirrel Focal Site and the buffer zone	2010–2011	MWRSP, FCW, Private forest managers
RS4POL2	Produce and implement a Mid Wales Red Squirrel Management Plan	2010–2011	MWRSP, FCW, Private forest managers
RS4POL3	Continue to attend Wales Squirrel Forum meetings to ensure that conservation of the Mid Wales red squirrel populations is included where appropriate in the Forum’s consultation responses and recommendations.	Ongoing	MWRSP, FCW, CCW
RS4POL4	Collaborate with the Wales BAP Woodland Ecosystem Group and	Ongoing	MWRSP, FCW, CCW

	Species Expert Group to ensure that red squirrel conservation is included in the Groups' respective consultation responses and recommendations.		
RS4POL5	Secure habitat improvements where required in Forest Design Plans produced by the Forestry Commission and private landowners, including plans produced through Better Woodlands for Wales and all future equivalent schemes.	Ongoing	FCW , Coed Cymru, private woodland owners
RS4POL6	Agree a squirrelpox virus action plan to ensure rapid action in the event of SQPV outbreak in red squirrels.	Ongoing	MWRSP , FCW, CCW,
RS4POL7	Contribute to the WSF review and assessment of the potential impact of climate change on red squirrel conservation in Wales with particular reference to Mid Wales.	Ongoing	MWRSP