

## **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.

### **Vision statement**

A five-year plan to consolidate the existing red squirrel populations by maximising the potential habitat area for reds within the Mid Wales forest region and protecting the population from grey squirrels. Any action will seek to meet one or more of the following objectives:

## Action Plan Objectives

- RS1** Ensure that activities are being managed so that they do not contribute to, or result in, a reduction in the range and distribution of the red squirrel or its habitat in mid Wales.
- RS2** To gather data on the distribution and status of red squirrels in the mid Wales
- RS3** To raise awareness of the importance of the red squirrel population in mid Wales and provide advice on habitat management
- RS4** To ensure that red squirrel conservation issues (including grey control) are incorporated in all relevant plans and policies that affect the mid Wales forests

**Summary of action achieved by LBAP Partners (for more information contact the biodiversity officer – Biodiversity@carmarthenshire.gov.uk) or visit the national Biodiversity Action Reporting System - <http://ukbars.defra.gov.uk>:**

### Action so far:

- Survey projects in 2005, 06, 07 and 08 to establish presence of red squirrels in mid Wales forests –MWRSP RS2
- DNA analysis of mid Wales specimens RS2
- Talks and walks undertaken – WTSWW/CCC/Selectfor/MISE RS3
- Articles published - WTSWW/CCC/Selectfor/MISE RS3
- Website produced – CCC/WWBIC RS3
- Condition analysis of key habitat areas for red squirrels in Tywi RS1
- Environment Wales funding to undertake pilot project within Focal Site buffer zone to look at feasibility of wide-scale grey squirrel control – WTSWW RS2
- Volunteer group formed and trained – MISE RS3
- Volunteer survey days in mid Wales forests – WTSWW/MISE/MWRSP RS2
- Work with schools on tree planting/feeder making – MISE RS3
- Attended Wales Squirrel Partnership meetings – MWRSP RS4
- Commented of Forest Design Plans – WTSWW RS4

### 2014

- Environment Wales and the Co-operative plastic bag fund helped WTSWW to provide a Red Squirrel Officer post (3 days/week) to engage with local communities– WTSWW RS3
- Trapping project in Cwm Berwyn – 3 reds trapped– MISE RS2
- Hair tube survey at Nant-y-Bai woodland, Rhandirmwyn – MISE RS2
- Four public meetings held in Project area – Pumsaint, Rhandirmwyn, Tregaron and Llanwrtyd Wells RS3
- Environment Wales-funded Trap Loan scheme launched to help with grey squirrel control in the focal area – WTSWW RS1/3
- Project [website](#) created – WTSWW RS3
- Radio-tracking project of red squirrels in Bryn Arau Duon forest – MISE RS2

### 2015

- Meetings have taken place between the RS Officer and NRW staff to discuss grey control and pre-operations surveys RS1
- Partnership members are drafting an advisory note on forestry operations and red squirrels in the MWRS focal site. RS1

- Camera traps have been erected in 2 sites in the MWRS focal site; one near Llanddewi Brefi , and the other near to Llanfair Clydogau and monitored by vols. RS2
- A website reporting facility has been set up. Sightings of red squirrels are being collated by the Red Squirrel Officer. RS2
- MWRSP leaflets have been produced RS3
- Talks and presentations to 12 different groups in or near to the project area, with a total of 327 people attending. RS3
- Red Squirrel Officer and volunteers have manned information stands at six different events and shows in the project area. RS3
- The project has hosted two public drop-in events, to raise awareness of red squirrels in the MWRS focal site, and to build membership of the Trap loan Scheme (TLS) RS3
- The TLS has grown and now has eight volunteer Local Coordinators and over 70 members.
- Two grey squirrel control training courses for TLS members RS3
- Meeting took place with MWRS Partnership members, forestry companies and NRW to present the findings of the 2012 Habitat report the recommendations. RS3
- Glastir Officer site visit to a woodland in the MWRS focal site; the visit focused on appropriate management of woodlands for red squirrel conservation. RS3
- Plans received from NRW and from Prior and Rickets with proposals for management of their estates with red squirrels measures incorporated. RS3

#### **Proposed future action**

- Management plan start for Tywi forest area - MWRSP
- Forest manager to produce proposals for management of their estates with red squirrels measures incorporated. RS3

#### **Legislation**

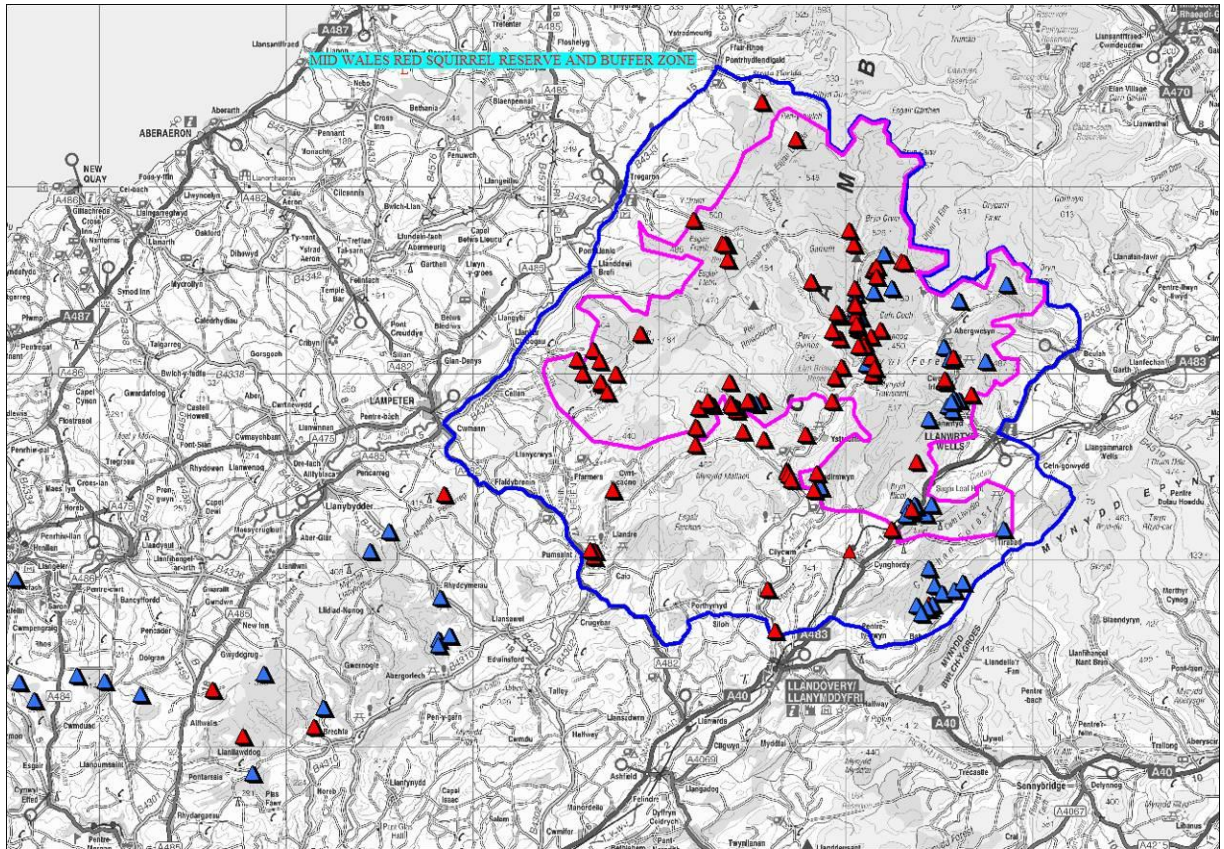
Under Section 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 it is an offence to:

- Intentionally kill, injure or take (capture) a red squirrel;
- Possess or control a live or dead red squirrel, or any part of a red squirrel or anything derived from a red squirrel;
- Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place which a red squirrel uses for shelter or protection
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb a red squirrel while it is occupying a structure or place which it uses for shelter or protection;
- Sell, offer or expose for sale, or have in one's possession or transport for the purpose of sale, any live or dead red squirrel, or any part of a red squirrel or anything derived from a red squirrel;

#### **Useful links**

- Wildlife Trusts – [red squirrel](#)
- [Mid Wales Red Squirrel Project](#)
- [Red Squirrel Survival Trust](#)





The Mid Red Squirrel Project currently consists of:

