



# Red Squirrel Survival Trust Newsletter

Autumn 2009

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HSBC Premier have kindly agreed to sponsor both the online and printed versions of our newsletter - thank you to the staff at the Carlisle Branch for their continued fundraising and support!

### Acknowledgments

Thank you to **Will Nicholls & Ian Short**, who kindly supplied squirrel photos used in this newsletter.  
[www.ianshortphotography.co.uk](http://www.ianshortphotography.co.uk)  
[www.wnicholls.com](http://www.wnicholls.com)

Thanks to **Richard Dyke & Sarah McNeil** for the Squirrel Fest photos.

Dear supporter,

It's newsletter time once again, and there have been many positive developments for RSST over the past few months. One hugely important announcement is that we have recently appointed Dr Craig Shuttleworth as our National Operations Director. Craig has spent the past decade running the successful Anglesey red squirrel project, which he will continue to oversee alongside his responsibilities for RSST. See page 2 for more details.

Encouragingly, sightings of red squirrels returning to areas where they had once been extinct continue to be reported. This newsletter contains two examples in Cumbria - in Firbank, near Sedbergh and at the Skelwith Fold Caravan Park in Ambleside. We've also included an interview with Amy Campbell (the Merseyside Red Squirrel Field Officer) about the battle to protect Merseyside's reds.

Next, have you ever thought of giving shares to charity? RSST now has a brokerage account, and we would be delighted to receive any spare shares you may have lying around! More information can be found on page 7.

Finally, on page 6 we have made some suggestions for exciting squirrel-themed Christmas gifts. These include Christmas cards, a porcelain squirrel (with a discount for RSST Friends) and even a squirrel beer! We've tried it and we're particularly impressed by the nutty aroma...

Best wishes,

Joshua Perry  
Director



## What's New With RSST

**There have been many positive developments for RSST in recent months, including the appointment of a new National Operations Director.**

### **New National Operations Director**



We are pleased to announce the appointment of Dr Craig Shuttleworth as our National Operations Director to co-ordinate RSST's involvement in red squirrel conservation around the UK.

We have created this role to ensure that red squirrels are protected wherever they can be found around the UK. We are conscious that while there are a range of local projects dedicated to protecting red squirrels across Britain, to date there has been no person responsible for making sure that all initiatives are joined up.

Craig has the experience and knowledge to lead our fight to save the red squirrel, following his work on Anglesey over the past decade. He has led a dedicated campaign of targeted grey squirrel control on the island, combining efforts from the public, private and voluntary sectors.

On his watch, Anglesey's red population has recovered from a critical low of 40 in 1999 to around 300 today. Dr Shuttleworth remains involved with work on Anglesey in a part-time capacity.

### **Working with the Forestry Commission and Natural England**

We are pleased to announce two important new joint initiatives with the Forestry Commission and Natural England.

#### **1. Grey Squirrel Control Mapping**

In October, Natural England, Forestry Commission and RSST will put to tender a jointly funded project to map in detail the work being done to control grey squirrels by ALL parties: institutions, landowners, volunteers and local groups. It will enable us to understand fully the extent of existing control efforts, and where we need to fill in the gaps.

#### **2. Grey Squirrel Control Fund**

At the same time, Natural England, Forestry Commission and RSST will also launch a £40,000 grey squirrel control fund to pay for locally led trapping projects in the North of England. Particular focus will be given to projects in and around the reserves and buffers. This includes the north of England border from coast to coast, the north Lakes and Merseyside.

We should make clear that this **sits alongside our existing commitment to welcome applications from groups anywhere where there are reds that need protecting.**

*Please contact Joshua Perry ([joshua.perry@rsst.org.uk](mailto:joshua.perry@rsst.org.uk)) for more information.*



## Project spotlight — Merseyside Red Squirrels Project

RSST has embarked on a project to save Merseyside's red squirrels in partnership with the Lancashire Wildlife Trust, Save Our Squirrels (SOS) and the National Trust.

Amy Campbell is Red Squirrel Field Officer for the project. RSST interviewed Amy recently about the project and her role within it.



### Could you describe the main aims of the Merseyside Red Squirrels Project?

Our objective is to protect the reds that survived the squirrelpox outbreak of 2006-2008 and help promote their recovery over the next 3 years. Our aims are to:

- Increase the area of grey squirrel control to prevent the spread of squirrelpox.
- Survey all woodlands in a 25km wide area to establish a more accurate picture of the red and grey squirrel population.
- Increase awareness of red squirrel conservation with landowners, the public and volunteers.

### Could you explain the impact that the squirrelpox outbreak of 2006-2008 had?

The squirrelpox outbreak was devastating; the refuge population was reduced from around 1,000 to an all time low of 100-150 individuals. There were fears that the population faced extinction, however this has proven unfounded. There has been no squirrelpox case recorded since December 2008 which has given the reds precious time to recover and breed. Signs show that this spring has seen a successful breeding season.

### What is your role within the Project?

I am the Red Squirrel Field Officer for the Wildlife Trust for Lancashire and North Merseyside. I spend most of my time 'in the field', my job varies day to day and can include: woodland monitoring, surveying, species specific control, trap loan to urban areas, researching landownership, transporting sick red squirrels, liaising with farmers, game keepers, members of the public and volunteers.

I am currently surveying over 130 woodlands. Where greys are encroaching on red squirrel habitat I set up trapping routes. This is only possible with the excellent support from landowners, volunteers and the public.

### What does the future hold for Merseyside's reds?

The future of the Merseyside reds is not certain but I am filled with enthusiasm. It is my hope that within 3 years we will once again have a thriving population of red squirrels along the Sefton coast. I look forward to a time when I see the fascinating and beautiful red squirrel every day.

For more details on the project, visit our website at [www.rsst.org.uk](http://www.rsst.org.uk).



## The reds are fighting back!

We are very happy to report two great examples of reds returning to areas in Cumbria. In both cases concerted grey squirrel control by the community was the key ingredient in their success.

John Hatt lives in Firbank and below he talks about his experience of reds returning to the grounds of his home.



"I have lived in Firbank, near Sedbergh in Cumbria for about 7 years. Not many miles to the north, there is a reasonable population of red squirrels.

However, since I bought my house, I had never seen a Red in our valley, nor ever heard of a neighbour getting sight of one.

However, a breakthrough came on the 20<sup>th</sup> of the last October, when for the very first time I saw a red squirrel feeding at my bird feeder.

With some excitement I announced this sighting to my neighbours; but, although they were too polite to say so, the look on their faces indicated their real opinion, which was that "these off-comers do tell the most ridiculous lies!"

Nonetheless, since that October there have now been several sightings in the valley—

sometimes by more trusted sources, such as farmers.

Only a mile away to the north, there have been three sightings; and a pair has regularly been seen to feed at a bird-feeder that is only a quarter of a mile to the south of my house. The neighbours have since been looking at me with marginally more trust!

I am sure that the resurrection of the Red population in our valley is because both off-comers and long-standing local inhabitants have been united in our aim of eliminating the Greys.

During the last few years we have made a constant effort with trapping and shooting. My unscientific impression has been that shooting is not always enough; and that merely trapping is not always enough. But that the combination of the two seems to be very effective."





## The reds are fighting back!

**Henry Wild of Skelwith Fold Caravan Park in Ambleside describes how holiday-makers played their part in securing the return of the red squirrels.**

**The park has a David Bellamy Gold Award for its conservation credentials. For more details please visit the park's website: [www.skelwith.co.uk](http://www.skelwith.co.uk)**

"At our holiday park in the Lake District, it was partly due to the enthusiasm of visitors that we have seen the welcome return of red squirrels.



It was three years ago that our conservation team decided we'd seen quite enough grey. This 130-acres of parkland and its deciduous woodland was once home to a thriving red squirrel population, but every single one had been ousted by the ubiquitous "tree rats".

We determined on a campaign to see the return of the reds, and advised the owners of the 300 holiday homes at Skelwith Fold of our intentions. To our delight, many owners came forward and offered to help in any way they could with our efforts.

Creating the environmental conditions which would encourage the reds to return took almost two years. And then, last autumn, the first colony of reds was spotted - and by the time winter had set in, we knew of at least eight established colonies.

We were conscious that the return of the reds was anything but a foregone conclu-

sion, for a few years previously we had sponsored a red squirrel breeding programme at Muncaster Castle in Cumbria.

Despite the apparently ideal setting of undisturbed mature woodland, and the undeniable zeal of the wildlife experts heading the programme, their efforts were in vain.

The success of our campaign was due to a lot of hard work on the part of Skelwith's holiday home owners plus our own conservation team, and this fantastic result has made everything worthwhile.

Whilst I don't suggest that we are in any respect a role model for other parts of the countryside wishing to see the return of their indigenous reds, there is one aspect of our experience from which lessons might be drawn.

It's that when a whole community settles on a course of action, the collective spirit to succeed will often win through. Education and determination are perhaps our two most effective weapons against the grey menace."





## RSST Christmas Gifts

RSST is delighted to introduce its exciting range of Christmas gifts!

### RSST Friends membership

Get your loved ones involved in red squirrel conservation by giving them the gift of an RSST Friends membership! See page 7 for details.

### Christmas cards

RSST is offering Christmas cards from a range by our sister organisation, the European Squirrel Initiative.

### Porcelain squirrel

Island Porcelain creates hand painted porcelain pieces depicting wildlife on and around the island of Arran.

Island Porcelain is kindly offering RSST Friends a discounted price of £15 for this charming porcelain red squirrel.



### Squirrel holiday

Atholl Estates are offering all RSST Friends a special 20% discount on bookings of their new Scandinavian-style Woodland Lodges. The lodges are set in the historic grounds of Blair Castle in Perthshire & are great place to spot red squirrels.

### Framed squirrel photos

Will Nicholls is a talented 14 year old wildlife photographer from Kielder, Northumberland. Will has very kindly offered RSST commission on sales of his framed red squirrel photos.



### Squirrel cookbook



The Squirrel's Pantry Tea Room in Cocker-mouth, Cumbria has published a recipe book in aid of Allerdale Red Squirrel Group. Some of the recipes are dishes that are served in the tea room and others are contributions from red squirrel volunteers. The recipe book costs £5.

### Squirrel beer

The Isle of Arran Brewery has recently launched a special squirrel beer! It's available online or in branches of Wine Rack around the UK.

*You'll find full details on all these great products at [www.rsst.org.uk](http://www.rsst.org.uk). Alternatively, phone or email us for more information. (See page 8 for our contact details.)*



## Fundraise for RSST!

### Interested in becoming an RSST Volunteer Regional Co-ordinator?

If so, contact Elaine Karmy using the contact details on page 8.

Our volunteer regional co-ordinators are vital to the growth of the charity. This involves:

- Representing RSST at local fairs and events
- Fundraising in your local area

- Publicising our work
- Distributing leaflets & collection tins to local shops and other outlets

*If you would like to find out more please contact Elaine Karmy using the contact details on the back page of this newsletter.*

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### Help spread the word about RSST by recruiting a Friend!

If you know anyone you think would be interested in becoming a Friend of the charity, please pass on our details!

RSST Friends are a group of committed supporters that form the core of our charity.

Friends memberships start from just £3 a month. When a new Friend joins they receive a Welcome Pack containing lots of squirrely items!

*If you would like to find out more please visit the **Get Involved** page of our website.*



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### Gift us shares!

Have you ever thought of giving shares to charity?

RSST now have a brokerage account with Hargreave Hale, so are able to accept gifts of stocks and shares. It's an incredibly tax efficient way of giving to charity – gifted shares are exempt from capital gains AND you also get the full income tax relief on the value of the gift at the date of transfer!

*If you would like to discuss this further, please get in touch with Joshua Perry using the contact details on the back page of this newsletter.*



## Squirrel Fest

Broadcasters Stuart Maconie and Eric Robson joined dedicated squirrel volunteers from across Cumbria at Northern Red Squirrels's inaugural Squirrel Fest event!

The day was expertly organised by NRS's Jackie Foott to thank volunteers for all their hard work in protecting red squirrels and to update them on progress. RSST provided the funding, and insurance costs were paid for by SOS. The event was held at Hutton-in-the-Forest, after Lord and Lady Inglewood generously offered the venue free of charge.



Squirrel Fest included a series of talks from experts about the work to preserve the red squirrel population, and was



compere'd by Stuart Maconie (left), who features on various BBC radio and TV programmes. He said: "I'm really aware of how fortunate I am to see red squirrels, so I said I would love to come down and take part."

Eric Robson (below right), who also spoke, added: "A substantial part of Cumbrian tourism is our natural environment, including two iconic creatures, the osprey and the red squirrel. Were Cumbria to lose red squirrels, people would quite understandably say that it was extraordinarily careless of us. But that is not going to happen, because of the work of so many volunteers and people working to bring them back into their natural habitat."



Along with the speeches, the event featured food, drink, a free raffle, delightful live music and even a crowd-pleasing juggler.

For insurance reasons, this year's event was by invitation only, yet there was still a fabulous turnout of 230 people! We're very hopeful that 2010 will play host to Squirrel Fest 2...

### Contact details

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