



PRESS RELEASE

Monday September 7th 2020

National Red Squirrel Awareness Week

Red Squirrel Survival Trust launches activities for upcoming seven-day campaign to save the native species

Red Squirrels are an endangered species and have been completely pushed out of their native habitats in the southern half of the British mainland. Numbers now stand at approximately 140,000 across the whole of the UK, down from an all-time high of 3.5 million. Leading the way in environmental conservation, the [Red Squirrel Survival Trust](#) launches its campaign during National Red Squirrel Awareness Week to accelerate efforts to prevent the extinction of this endangered species.

From 21st to 27th September, the charity will engage in activities to raise awareness of the plight of the red squirrel, including exclusive interviews with leading conservationists from across all corners of the British Isles. From Cornwall, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Cumbria, figures with unique insights into red squirrel strongholds will shed light on the vital work being done to protect the native populations facing the continuing threat of grey squirrel colonisation.

To make a difference this autumn, you can get involved in Red Squirrel Awareness Week by attending a dedicated [webinar](#) on red squirrel conservation, reaching out to your local squirrel group to find out how you can help, by donating to the RSST, and by reposting social media content to spread knowledge on the work being done, and why we are striving to save our red squirrel.

To survive, red squirrels need support from local communities and the public. That is why the RSST will also be celebrating the ongoing achievements of hundreds of volunteer groups across the country which are safeguarding these animals for future generations. Red squirrel conservation includes methods such as: provision of sustenance feeders, reporting sightings of grey-squirrels, the re-introduction of reds into suitable woodlands, the preservation of trees and necessary habitats that can strengthen their numbers, as well as cutting-edge research into non-lethal and humane grey squirrel management.

David Bliss, Trustee of the RSST comments on the run up to the Red Squirrel Awareness Week:

“We are very excited about this year’s campaign, especially as after lockdown there is a general and growing feeling of the essential importance of green spaces and nature to our wellbeing as a nation. While some of us are very familiar with the plight of the red squirrel, much of the public is in the dark about the details of the threat from grey squirrels, and what is being done about it. Sustaining red squirrel populations depends on raising awareness, so we are looking forward to exhibiting the fantastic work being done with these leaders in the wildlife management space.”

The campaign seeks to focus on the extensive economic and ecological damage caused by grey squirrels, which will result in a devastating change to the British landscape. Here in the UK, the broad-leafed woodlands that provide squirrels with their habitat are being devastated by the ‘bark stripping’ behaviours of the greys that expose trees to pathogens. All broad-leafed trees under the age of 40 are at risk, which means that in the decades to come, not only will the red squirrels have no habitat south of the northern pine forests, but native broadleaf woodlands are in grave danger of being destroyed.

Greys are also responsible for transmitting the [Squirrel Pox virus](#) that exclusively affects the reds, usually being fatal. To confront this, RSST is engaged in spearheading money-raising efforts to sustain the promising research into regulating grey squirrel fertility, along with the [UK Squirrel Accord](#).

So far, they have been successful in raising considerable funds for the DEFRA-led research project. Now, the Animal Plant Health Agency needs a further £250,000 to complete the research which is now into its third year. That is why RSST is encouraging donations to their cause during Red Squirrel Awareness Week to support the invaluable fertility research being undertaken. The benefits already identified include significant potential for the delivery of a benign and effective oral contraceptive which will help to regulate the uncontrolled spread of greys. This long-term solution is a cost-effective and publicly accepted tool which will significantly decrease the ecological and economic impact of this invasive species and halt the decline of our native British reds.

Work in 2020 will focus on development of the oral contraceptive, creating a system to monitor the quantity of bait consumed by grey squirrels. At this critical moment for environmental conservation across the world, protecting endangered species is in a crucial phase. Today, North American grey squirrels have replaced the native red squirrel across much of the British Isles, and more needs to be done to make sure our native species survives. You can [donate online](#) to the RSST and make a real impact, the red squirrels thank you!

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Media Enquiries:

All Media Enquiries to Barbara Huddart – Glendale PR – barbara@glendalepr.co.uk –
01668 283 044 – 07980 850 394

Editor's Notes:

The Red Squirrel Survival Trust is a national charity established to ensure the conservation and protection of the red squirrel in the UK. The RSST focuses on areas of education and awareness-raising, animal and woodland protection, environmental conservation, and research to secure the red squirrel's long-term future. It works to protect red squirrels by keeping reds and greys apart, supporting initiatives in areas where red squirrel population numbers have stabilised or are increasing, and establish new red colonies across the UK wherever feasible.

<https://www.rsst.org.uk/>