



Red Squirrel © www.rick-thornton-photography.com

Working with Wildlife

Red Squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*) Species Action Plan

Plan Co-ordinator	Woodland Group
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Latest version	January 2010

Description

The red squirrel can reach a body length of up to 220mm, has a distinct red/brown pelt, a long bushy tail of uniform colour, and characteristic ear tufts that are particularly prominent in winter. The colour of a red squirrels coat can vary, ranging from dark brown/black, to blonde tones due to bleaching by summer sunlight.

Red squirrels are adapted for living and moving about in trees, with ranges extending up to 8 hectares dependent on the habitat type. Food sources vary throughout the year to include: ripe tree seeds and nuts, berries and fruits, fungi, shoots, flowers, bark, lichens and invertebrates. Population densities vary greatly from as low as 0.2 per hectare in Sitka Spruce woodland, to an average of 1 per hectare in broadleaf woodland. They are limited to crossing up to 500m of open ground so a structurally diverse and continuous habitat is therefore important.

Red squirrels live in either a dense ball of twigs and leaves known as a drey located in a branch fork against the tree trunk, or a hollow in a tree known as a den. Summer dreys are less substantial platforms of twigs, and squirrels rotate between several dreys to limit build up of parasites.

The red squirrel is active by day, and does not hibernate, although will remain in the shelter of a drey for longer periods during adverse weather conditions. The breeding season runs from January to October, with the first litter of around 3-4 kittens in spring and a second litter in summer dependent on food availability.

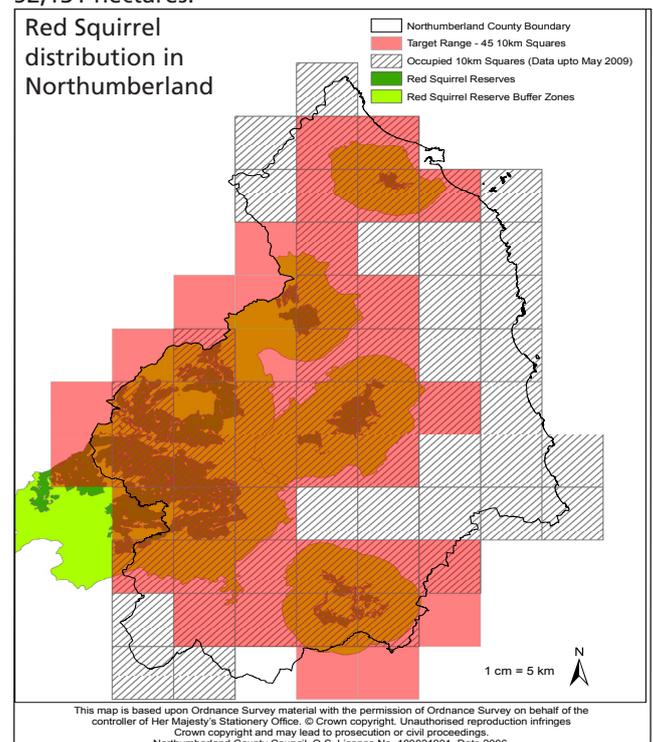
Conservation Status

Bern Convention, Appendix III
UK Biodiversity Action Plan Species
North East Biodiversity Action Plan Species

Current Extent in Northumberland

In order to maintain populations of red squirrels across their current range in the UK conservation activity will focus on selected priority woodland areas. A total of 16 red squirrel reserves have been established in the North of England and 9 of these are found in Northumberland. This strategy aims to ensure that main centres of populations will be viable in the long term. Areas outside of the priority zones with red squirrel populations can expect to lose them over the next few decades. Whilst it may seem strange to have a BAP target that recognises a decline, to do otherwise is considered to be unrealistic. If no action is taken to defend the priority areas the red squirrel is likely to decline to extinction in mainland England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The red squirrel is widely distributed across Northumberland, recorded in 62 10km National Grid squares since 2000. Of these squares, 39 lie within the 9 red squirrel reserves in Northumberland and their 5km radius buffer zones. The reserves cover approximately 52,131 hectares.



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Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline

- Spread of the non-native grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*)
- Squirrelpox virus

Associated Action Plans

Native Woodland
Black Grouse

Further Information

This red squirrel action plan links to the red squirrel UK Biodiversity Action Plan, whose lead partner is JNCC.

The Save Our Squirrels project website - www.saveoursquirrels.org.uk

Pepper, H. & Patterson, G. (1998). Red Squirrel Conservation. Practice Note 5. Forestry Commission, Edinburgh.

Wauters, L.A, Lurz, P.W.W. & Gurnell, J. (2000). Interspecific effects of grey squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*) on the space use and population demography of red squirrels (*Sciurus vulgaris*) in conifer plantations. Ecological Research, Vol 15, 271-284.

Targets

Maintain the current range of the red squirrel in Northumberland within the 9 red squirrel reserves and their 5 kilometre buffer zones of 45 occupied 10 km grid squares by 2015

Code	Priority Actions	Date
RS A01	Establish contact with all reserve and buffer zone land owners and managers	2008
RS A02	Provide funding advice to landowners and managers in the buffer zone areas and encourage grant applications	ongoing
RS A03	Establish a grey control network in the buffer zones	ongoing
RS A04	Provide conservation advice and training for reserve and buffer zone landowners and managers and partner organisations	ongoing
RS A05	Establish a monitoring network across the 9 reserves	ongoing
RS A06	Conduct biannual monitoring across the 9 reserves	ongoing
RS A07	Establish and train a team of volunteers to assist in the monitoring of red squirrels in reserves and buffer zones	ongoing
RS A08	Produce additional Buffer Zone Management guidelines	2008
RS A09	Establish local groups in strategic locations to implement red squirrel conservation	ongoing
RS A10	Set up and maintain a database of all sightings data	ongoing
RS A11	Produce a map of red and grey squirrel distribution across the region	ongoing
RS A12	Establish contact with red squirrel conservation officers across the country to ensure that conservation efforts in Northumberland link up with those from bordering regions	2007
RS A13	Coordinate a summit of local councils to enhance the protection of urban and suburban populations	2007
RS A14	Raise awareness about the importance and management of Northumberland's red squirrels through publicity material, events and training	ongoing
RS A15	Create a flagship access and interpretation visitor facility in Kielder Forest	2010