**Knowledge fair interactive lesson learning session (facilitated by Mariella Marzano, Forest Research)**

**What has worked well**

Both personal contact and use of social medial were key areas that have worked well for some of the groups. The importance of a project officer or ranger to coordinate and liaise with volunteers was flagged up as important as well as training sessions and access to resources.

*Communication and engagement*

* Getting good quality photo-footage to raise P.R. via social media
* Talking frankly about what we do and why, and the reality of what happens if we don’t do this
* Facebook is very useful
* Using cut/comical red squirrel images with important or harsh messages
* Talking to and developing positive relationships with keepers – they kill a lot of greys around pheasant feeders

*Volunteer and professional networks*

* Having professional rangers augmenting areas with low human population density. Greys were eliminated with reds coming back
* Having a good/dedicated project officer – coordinating volunteers or strong community-led leadership. This is crucial
* Having different skills and roles within groups
* Networks increase confidence and deepen understanding

*Science, technology and training*

* Long-term monitoring programmes (e.g. RSNEs annual spring survey) measures change over time
* Talks followed by monitoring
* Training session on dispatch
* Kania traps to dispatch

**Challenges**

Challenges can be divided into five broad headings. As we will see below the presence of a staff or rangers to act as a central contact person for volunteers is considered to be crucial and an example was given of where volunteers were unable to keep up the momentum without this support. Recognition of volunteer effort is also important and they often have other commitments and priorities. Another key issue includes recruiting enough trappers and those willing to dispatch grey squirrels, which may also be linked to perceptions around killing squirrels as well as time and resources. Access to private or publicly managed land is clearly a concern as well as a perceived lack of a ‘unified’ (national) voice on red squirrel conservation/grey squirrel control.

*Recruiting and maintaining contact*

* When the contracts for the rangers ended, the greys came back, reds were lost and volunteers lost heart
* Recognition of volunteer effort
* Recruiting trappers/ dispatchers

*Time and resources*

* Lack of time is a constraint (not lack of willingness)
* Converting interest into actual volunteering
* Funding for the community groups
* Grant schemes/ funding (e.g. agri-environment schemes). They could be effective but have been exploited or not used to full potential
* Funds to enable publicity or training

*Public and landowner support*

* Talking to intransigent landlords & large estates who won’t control greys or allow volunteers on their land
* Control (or lack of) on public land
* Forestry Commission
* Access to private land denied creating issues with grey population build-up
* Engagement with landowners not always successful
* Local squirrel group is against culling and thus RSU
* Lack of sense of urgency in areas less affected by greys
* Hiding the situation
* Difficult people
* Public perception needs to be improved

*Technical challenges*

* Using feeders and camera traps in a conifer woodland close to a broadleaf wood. The use of feeders encouraged grey squirrels into the monitoring area and potentially kept red squirrels out
* Recognising failures and improving
* Targeting a large enough area and having the resources to coordinate work in that area
* Local by-laws (e.g. shooting not allowed)

*Networks and responsibility*

* No unified voice that is sustainable
* Loss of momentum as a result of poor leadership
* Establishing groups as independent organisations

**Overcoming challenges**

There are a number of ways that Knowledge Fair participants have dealt with challenges. The use of social media in sharing knowledge and raising awareness appears here and under key lessons. Technologies can improve capacity and effectiveness of volunteer effort as well as looking to other sectors (such as shooting organisations) for support. Greater engagement with land owners, communities and the broader public can increase support and access to land as well as making sure there is a strong evidence base to demonstrate that grey squirrel control works. Greater coordination at the national level could improve the red squirrel conservation message.

*Technical*

* Removing feeders from a camera monitored conifer forest led to less or no grey squirrel incursions and the re-appearance of a red squirrel
* Private communication groups e.g. whatsapp allow sharing of skills between rangers and volunteers
* Engage more of the shooting fraternity to become trappers
* It can be very difficult to get people to send in meaningful data…we overcame this by staff ringing around volunteers and/or simplifying recording systems
* Using the kania trap has increased volunteer capacity and could be useful in other areas such as urban

*Coordination and communication*

* Clear objectives and clear communication from RSU
* RSU partners together at one event i.e. Birdfair
* Centralised database like in Scotland
* Difficulties in establishing an independent group could be overcome by being under the umbrella of another local charity

*Public and landowner support*

* Increased public engagement
* Direct contact [with landowners] = increased access
* Getting local council support
* Working out the processes of getting landowners on board
* Advertisement of red squirrel presence within stronghold areas – the public are still unaware of red squirrels in the area
* Get politicians involved
* Deeper understanding would encourage others to control
* Demonstrating it [grey squirrel control] can work
* **Key lessons learnt**

The majority of lessons learned focussed on public and community engagement recognising that face-to-face contact is important but that social media approaches and use of ‘champions’ can broaden support for red squirrel conservation and what it entails

*Awareness raising and engagement*

* Presence of reds encourages a sense of ownership. This leads to a better public understanding of the need to control greys
* Celeb help (John Lewis) could be useful
* Hold public meetings
* Do something with grey squirrel carcasses – this may lead to more public acceptance
* Leaflet drops
* Build and maintain relationships – the person/individual can make a difference
* It takes time to build relationships and trust
* Choose your battleground and avoid spending too much time reacting/responding to the ‘few’ and shouting individuals
* You need to pay attention to the media – you are doing them a favour with content
* Networking via social media e.g. facebook, twitter, whatsapp – these platforms are better for public awareness as they allow picture sharing
* More education and community outreach in grey only areas – access to reds would be helpful
	+ Educating young people in schools
* Appeals for help through radio/press (word of mouth best)
* Sponsored advert in a local free paper/magazine to promote volunteer work or remind people to call in a red/grey sighting
* Feedback to people will encourage volunteers to keep communication

*Technical and administrative support*

* Implementing seasons for trapping
* Need one place for resources e.g. a centralised website