**Knowledge fair interactive session focussed on: *Local Strategy Development***

**Session hosts**: Simon O’Hare (Northumberland Wildlife Trust) and Conor McKinney (Ulster Willdife)

The hosts introduced the session with a brief presentation, outlining the importance of community participation in conservation projects, and that community buy-in is integral to long term success on a global scale. Whilst recognising that community effort is at the core of UK squirrel conservation, the hosts called for more advocacy of the volunteer effort. A map was shown to demonstrate the geographical footprint of grey squirrel management in northern England during 2017 which showed that 80% of grey kills were recorded by community groups.

The work shop element of the session was then introduced. This focused principally on local strategies, and the motive was to encourage people, particularly volunteers, to consider the importance of clearly defining objectives. Four points were provided to stimulate round-table discussion. Each group was given time to discuss these questions, and then the hosts asked each table to feedback a few of the key points form the discussion. Post it notes were used to capture comments, and these were collated at the end of the session. The workshop questions, and group responses are summarised below:

1. How do groups measure success? Are objectives written down?
2. Do you write up a local strategy? What should be included? What could help you create one?
3. What should we have at a national level and can local strategies help to feed into this?
4. Does it matter?

**Objectives and measuring success**

It was felt that some projects have clearly written strategies, with buy in from local groups:

*“Groups under SSRS umbrella and automatically sign up to projects aims”*

Some project areas use monitoring programmes to evaluate success:

*“Merseyside- bi-annual monitoring & accurate record keeping help understand success”*

*“Kielder- spring time monitoring & early warning system”*

Others defined success as:

*“Increase in red sightings”*

*“Increase in awareness within a community”*

*“North Wales- seeing less greys is a measure of success”*

*“Decline in greys leading to an increase in reds”*

One person highlighted the lack of locally defined strategy:

*“No objectives written down- we only record sightings and kills”*

There were some thoughts about the usefulness of a clearly written strategy, although some concerns over limitations of strategy documents:

“*Strategy is useful for fundraising”*

*“Needs to take account of regional differences”*

*“Paper strategy is useful but delivery is always limited in reality by who is available”*

“*Local strategies better because not everywhere is the same”*

*“We often have to reinvent what we do to provide novelty for funders. A strategy can help make the case for the importance of long term funding commitment”*

**Comments on local & national strategy were:**

“*National strategy must allow local detailed strategy to evolve’*

*“Community group autonomy is key”*

*“Umbrella organisations to deal with large issues/policy, supplemented by local community groups”*

*“Bring in qualified people to write strategy with support from RSU”*

**A high number of comments related to strategy content, highlighting some of the challenges and aspirations involved. For example:**

“*Make clear that results might not be instant. No reds does not = waste of time”*

*“Fill in gaps between local groups”*

*“How do you raise awareness without upsetting small communities? Local rifts”*

*“Sensitive education needed. How do you change minds?”*

“*Grey squirrel dominance nationally is a problem”*

*“Get more people out seeing reds”*

*“Get public on board to recognise reds as our native species”*

*“We need paid rangers everywhere!”*

*“We need a change in attitude within some national groups”*

*“Need to know how to work with geographical barriers and habitat types in order to make local strategy more effective”*

*“Local area clearance, extend and enlarge buffer zone, deal with corridors and follow reds”*

*“Use geographical features”*