



Red Squirrels United Knowledge Fair 2019 - Red Squirrel Strategy group discussion

Following presentations on the current progress of Red Squirrels United, the UK Squirrel Accord and the development of an England strategy for red squirrel conservation, delegates were asked to consider several questions and discuss them in groups. A summary of these discussions is as follows:

Should we keep the Red Squirrels United banner?

Feedback indicated that Red Squirrels United has a strong brand but there is confusion over the many overarching bodies such as the Red Squirrel Survival Trust, British Red Squirrels and the UK Squirrel Accord. However, a new, overarching strategy is vital to provide a framework and the sector would benefit from a coordinator that isn't government led. Other comments indicated that sustained funding is necessary, the annual knowledge fair is very valuable, could happen more than once a year and should continue.

What kind of project next?

Large scale project

A UK level project is needed to maintain networks, knowledge exchange and political influence. This should sit in line with an agreed strategy and contain a combination of UK, UK and Ireland and regional approaches. Coordination at a UK level and coordinated data collection and mapping is useful but needs UK, regional and local layers. Also need to consider if UK coordination is the best way to maximise funding opportunities.

Regional levels

Operating in regions is a good way to rationalise the approach (such as Wales and Scotland) if better integrated and have better communications. Stronghold management strategies and any reintroduction schemes should be organised at a regional level. Funding for regional level staff/rangers, resourcing for local groups is essential and regular regional meetings are beneficial

Local levels

Maps and more structure where work is being undertaken by local groups is needed along with more communication across local groups. Cross border working (across national and group borders) should be encouraged. Funding should not be a 'free for all' and we should be cautious of competition. If funding is 'a free for all' it should be with a national platform such as the UK Squirrel Accord. There is a concern that operating at the local level could lead to repetition and that not all groups have the skills required for funding bids.

What should we do at a UK level?

Need cooperation, cohesion and unity at a UK level and across all groups to ensure a unified approach but one that acknowledge needs and challenges of specific groups. Legislation needs to be comparable and consistent as does funding. If government is serious about delivering the 25 year environmental plan, it needs to fund the likes of RSU (or similar) to be a 'voice' and HQ on a sustainable and continuous basis to ensure a unified approach and sustained effort. A knowledge strategy, funding and coordination should be captured under this approach. Such a model should be driven by a national strategy to direct focus enabling a suite of approaches along with further scientific research, provide opportunities for projects/groups/organisations to learn from each other and share best practice and expertise. Species don't recognise borders so a joined-up, cross border approach is also essential.



Communications to the general public must improve and visibility needs to be increased. Communications should be educative, informative and work on ‘hearts and minds’ developing greater understanding of the impacts of grey squirrels and the effects on red squirrels. The plethora of fake news need addressing, and we need to ensure that all voices at all levels are heard to further conservation efforts. National organisations have a key role to play in this and should play a greater role in supporting and assisting a national effort. Consistency across multi-layered organisations is also key as many at present lack a unified approach or position.

Grey squirrel contraception could be a useful tool but appears very expensive. However, it could be useful in areas where direct control may not be acceptable. Pine marten could also be a useful approach although disease screening should be carried out prior to any pine marten releases. Released pine martens could also be radio tagged to enable tracking. Lastly, there was a suggestion that red squirrels should be added to schedule nine requiring a license for release.