



Red Squirrels United

Annual report on project activity
Year one: Nov 2015 – Nov 2016





Action C1 Urban IAS grey squirrel management in North Merseyside

Executive Summary

The Community Engagement Officer and Red Squirrel Ranger have both been in post since September 2016. Since then activities under Action C1 have been underway throughout the North Merseyside and West Lancashire area. These include grey squirrel control and community engagement events such as guided walks and a Squirrel Fun Day.

Grey squirrel control has been undertaken both by the ranger in the woodlands and through the urban trap loan scheme. Participation in the trap loan scheme remains constant in Southport and Crosby but is beginning to increase, with the formation of a new group in Maghull.

Red and grey squirrel sightings continue to be received from members of the public and all sightings and grey squirrel control data are recorded in a format approved by Newcastle University for their data analysis.

Introduction

The North Merseyside and West Lancashire red squirrel population is the southernmost population in mainland England and has provided socio-economic benefits to the local economy through tourism, attracting approximately 300,000 visitors per year. Conserving this red squirrel population is a key motivation for controlling grey squirrels here. The loss of the red squirrel population here would reduce participation in grey squirrel control even further and allow their expansion into the current grey squirrel free coastal woodlands.

Community awareness regarding the impact of grey squirrels as a non native invasive species in the urban areas outside of the coastal woodlands is currently low. Grey squirrels are now becoming a common sight in the parks and amenity spaces in Crosby and Southport, as shown by the previous 12 years of monitoring data. These 2 towns have the highest human populations but little community participation. Intervention is needed now to prevent further establishment of this invasive species. This will be in the form of grey squirrel control undertaken by a Red Squirrel Ranger throughout identified priority areas and promotion of trap loan scheme by the community engagement officer, including training of new volunteers.

Expected results

There have been no reported cases of Squirrel Pox virus during September to December 2016. The Red Squirrel Ranger has started carrying out grey squirrel control in the designated woodlands and has established good working relationships with 6 different landowners. Work has been focused at 2 sites in Scarisbrick, 1 site in Southport and 3 sites in Crosby, covering a total of 48 hectares of woodland. Both live capture trapping and shooting from feeders have been employed as grey squirrel control methods, depending on the conditions at each site.

The Community Engagement Officer has been working to establish links with Sefton Council, the local authority who own all of the public parks within Southport and Crosby. Permission has been granted from Sefton Council to undertake grey squirrel control in



Botanic Gardens in Southport. Two volunteers have been recruited to undertake this work which will commence in the spring. This delay is due to the fact that the park needs to be closed to the public during works and to minimize disturbance the council have requested the park is open by 8am. Support from Sefton Council is a big step forward in establishing support for grey squirrel control in Southport.

Progress has been made towards establishing a trap loan network in Maghull. Currently there is one new volunteer and one household involved. Contact has been made with each individual current trap loan volunteer and a meeting is planned for January 2017. Throughout October and November, 9 households in Crosby, Southport and Maghull borrowed traps and caught 17 grey squirrels.

On 20 October, the Community Engagement Officer met with the LWT Volunteer coordinator at The Barn to discuss how to maximize recruitment of new volunteers within the project and confirm volunteer induction procedures. Volunteer grey squirrel control roles and have now been finalized and roles are ready to be advertised through the LWT website and current volunteer database. It is hoped this will contribute towards increasing the number of volunteers participating in the trap loan scheme.

Three community engagement events were planned for the first year. Two have already been held in the first 4 months - a Red Squirrel Guided walk at Freshfield Dune Heath on 2 October (Figure 1) and a Red Squirrel Fun Day at Formby National Trust on 26 October (Figure 2). The guided walk was attended by both children and adults who had travelled mainly from within the project area. Some people were local and were interested in finding out more about red squirrel conservation in the area, where as others had never seen a red squirrel before and were hoping for their first sighting. It was a very successful event during which we saw 5 red squirrels.

The Red Squirrel Fun Day was a partnership event with the National Trust. The site at Formby is a very popular tourist attraction and is well known for its red squirrel population. People travel from throughout Merseyside and Lancashire to see red squirrels here which makes it an ideal site to engage with communities within the project area and educate people about the grey squirrel control efforts ongoing in the wider landscape to maintain this red squirrel population. This event included information on the RSU project, squirrel based activities for children (squirrel ears, drey building) and guided walks to see red squirrels.

On 27 September the Community Engagement Officer was interviewed on the BBC Radio 2 breakfast show to talk about Red Squirrel Week. This was excellent national publicity at the start of the project.

Indicators

98 reports of red and grey squirrel sightings received from members of the public during September through to December 2016. These have all been verified and recorded by the Red Squirrel Admin volunteer. There have been no confirmed cases of squirrel pox during this reporting period. Figures 3 and 4 show the distribution of recorded red and grey squirrel sightings throughout 2016 from public sightings, grey squirrel control and surveys.



On 28 September, the Red Squirrel Ranger and Community Engagement Officer met with Newcastle University to discuss data collection and reporting procedures for grey squirrel control data from woodlands and also trap loan in the urban areas. Decisions were made on the data required and frequency of reporting. This will enable the ecological evaluation work at Newcastle University to begin quickly and in turn enable feedback to the project area to begin.

23 people attended the guided walk at Freshfield Dune Heath on 02/10/2016. This was recorded on Lancashire Wildlife Trust sign-in sheets.

The Red Squirrel Fun Day at Formby National Trust was an open event aimed at families and it is estimated approximately 80 people attended and took part in the squirrel themed crafts and activities.

Media hits: 1 radio interview with Community Engagement Officer.

Future Plans

A newsletter to send to all volunteers and interested members of the public is under construction. We aim to have this in circulation within the next 6 months.

The first monitoring training workshop is planned for February 2017. Feedback from this will inform future training workshops, for both monitoring and grey squirrel control.



Figure 1. Guided walk at Freshfield Dune Heath, 02/10/2016.



Figure 2. Red Squirrel Fun Day at National Trust Formby, 26/10/2016.

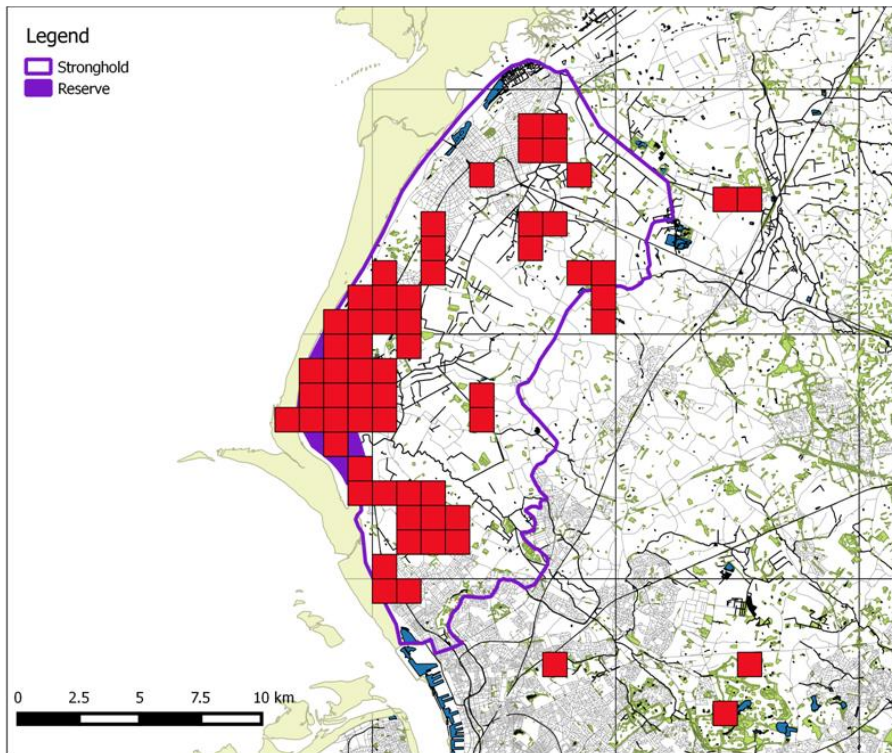


Figure 3. Red Squirrel distribution in 2016, compiled from public sightings, grey squirrel control data and surveys.

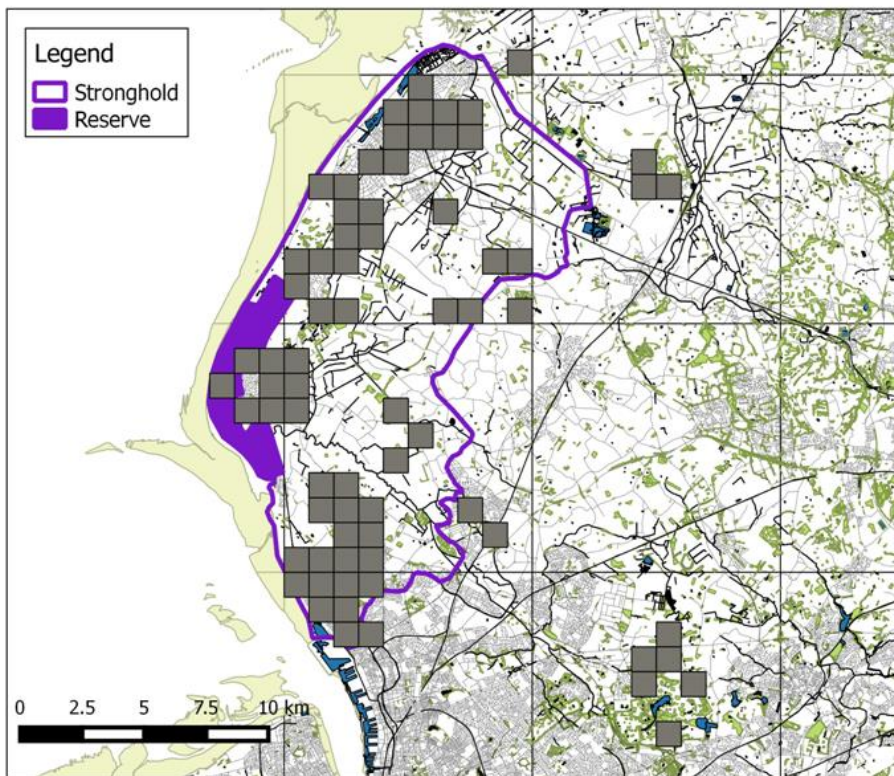


Figure 4. Red Squirrel distribution in 2016, compiled from public sightings, grey squirrel control data and surveys.