



Red Squirrels United

Annual report on project activity
Year two: Nov 2016 – Oct 2017



Action C1 Urban IAS grey squirrel management in North Merseyside

Executive Summary

Activities under Action C1 have been underway throughout the North Merseyside and West Lancashire area, carried out by the Community Engagement Officer and Red Squirrel Ranger. Staffing issues have meant there has been a 2 month gap in the Ranger post and a new member of staff but the post is now stable and grey squirrel control throughout the designated areas continues.

Grey squirrel control continues in the towns through the urban trap loan scheme. Participation in the trap loan scheme has increased in Crosby after a successful urban trap loan workshop but effort now needs to be focused in Southport and Maghull.

The Community Engagement Officer has run 18 events and workshops throughout the project area in this time to increase community awareness regarding the impact of grey squirrels as a non-native invasive species, particularly on the red squirrel. There is real passion from the local community to see red squirrels in the Southport parks again and this drives support for grey squirrel control.

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 would further reduce participation in grey squirrel control and allow their expansion into the current grey squirrel free coastal woodlands.

Over recent years, grey squirrels have become 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 in recent years, little community participation. Activities under Action C1 are vital to prevent further establishment of this invasive species and raise awareness within local communities. Activities include grey squirrel control undertaken by a Red Squirrel Ranger throughout identified priority areas; promotion of the urban trap loan scheme by the community engagement officer, including training of new volunteers; and awareness raising events to promote the work of the project and recruit and train new volunteers.



It is worth noting that due to the delay in starting the project (until September 2016) the first Annual Report only covered a period of 3 months (September 2016 – December 2016), therefore it is difficult to make comparisons on aspects such as community support and red and grey squirrel distribution between these 2 reports.

Expected results and Indicators.

1. *No new disease outbreak in the coastal reserve woodlands in Formby and Ainsdale from January 2017 onwards.*

There had been a spike in dead red squirrels found in August/September 2017. This coincided with an influx of grey squirrels into Formby as the result of a good breeding year and potentially due to a gap in the Ranger post and therefore grey squirrel control during a critical time of year. Carcasses were sent to Animal Plant and Health Agency and there were no confirmed cases of Squirrel Pox virus but several confirmed cases of Adenovirus, a gastrointestinal disease. Due to restrictions with the test for this disease, it is not known whether in these cases the disease was the cause of death or not. Squirrels can carry this disease without showing any symptoms.

2. *Increase and expand community participation in the urban trap loan scheme in Crosby, Southport, Scarisbrick, Maghull and Lydiate.*

356 red and grey squirrel sightings were reported by members of the public. These have all been verified and recorded by the Red Squirrel Admin volunteer.

There are now over 70 households participating in the urban trap loan scheme throughout Crosby, Southport, Scarisbrick, Maghull and Lydiate (Figure 1).

A successful urban trap loan workshop was run in Blundellsands, Crosby which 37 local residents attended. The event was publicised by a leaflet drop and this was very well received with lots of positive interest from those the local community. Everyone who attended was happy to trap grey squirrel in their gardens and a third of the attendees requested traps at the time but there is still a shortage of volunteers willing to dispatch the trapped grey squirrels. This is something that needs to be addressed urgently as the scheme expands.

We hope to build on the success of this workshop and do similar events in Southport, particularly around the parks (Botanic Gardens and Hesketh Park). Previously, permission had been granted by Sefton Council for volunteers to carry out grey squirrel control by



shooting in Botanic Gardens, but unfortunately the volunteers pulled out due to the strict regulations imposed by the council. We are still working to resolve this issue but expansion of the trap loan scheme and awareness of the project around the parks is key to controlling grey squirrels here.

The community engagement officer has also worked to develop a relationship with the Friends of Botanic Gardens Volunteer Group, meeting with them on 20/03/17. The group are keen to see red squirrels back in the park and have invited RSU to have a stall at events within the park.

- 3. Run a minimum of 6 grey squirrel control training workshops and 3 squirrel monitoring workshops by the end of year 3. Public attendance in excess of 20 people per function.*

Monitoring workshop, Southport 26/02/2017.

15 people from within and beyond the project area attended this workshop which covered various monitoring techniques including visual transects, hair tubes and trail cameras. 5 people then went on to take part in the Spring 2017 monitoring program,

Urban trap loan workshop, Crosby 22/09/2017.

This workshop was promoted with a targeted leaflet drop which was highly successful. 37 residents all from within the area of Blundellsands in Crosby attended, approximately one third of whom then requested traps. Local residents who were not able to attend but received a leaflet also got in touch separately to request traps.

- 4. One awareness raising/promotion event each year from year 1 to year 3 achieving public attendance of 150 people.*

In addition to the Monitoring and Urban Trap Loan workshops there have been a further 16 events during this reporting period, engaging approximately 645 people, including 300 children (see Figures 2 and 3). These include:

- 4 guided walks
- third party events with Sefton Council and National Trust, as well as with local businesses such as garden centres and vets.
- 3 talks for local groups



5. *Build relations with at least 1 school in each action area (Crosby, Southport, Scarisbrick, Maghull). Gain access to deliver awareness raising and educational workshops.*

The Community Engagement Officer has made contact with 2 schools in Southport and Crosby plus a local college in Preston.

- Talk at Birkdale High School, Southport on 24/01/2017. This was a talk to the Green Machine, an extra-curricular environmental group within the school. The talk covered the project as well as how they can monitor red and grey squirrel presence within the school grounds.
- Squirrel workshop with St Luke's Church Primary School, Crosby at Alexandra Park on 18/10/2017. 26 primary school children took part in 3 different squirrel activities and games to learn about squirrel ecology and the threats facing red squirrels including habitat loss and competition from grey squirrels (Figure 4).
- Squirrel monitoring workshop with Myerscough College at Ainsdale National Nature Reserve on 27/06/2017.

6. *Establishing online social media presence, achieving over 1000 followers on Facebook.*

Social media presence has been increasing throughout the project. More importantly it is now a platform for interaction with the public with people reporting sightings, posting photographs and posting queries. As of May 2018 the page has 1148 followers.

The Community Engagement Officer has also now produced an e-newsletter (Figure 5) which is another platform for interacting with a greater proportion of the local communities. Through this we promote the project, events and how people can volunteer and get involved. The first edition went out in July 2017 and the second in October 2017. We now have 81 subscribers which is steadily increasing as the newsletter is promoted through Facebook, events and also when members of the public get in touch to report sightings or with queries.

7. *12 local media hits over 3 years (newspaper/local radio/northwest news) resulting in positive press coverage.*



The Red Squirrel Community Engagement Officer has appeared on numerous TV and Radio shows promoting the project. These are listed in the Table 1 below.

Table 1. Summary of media hits between November 2016 and October 2017.

Media type	National or Local coverage	Description	Date filmed	Location	Date aired
TV	National	Filming with BBC Breakfast	23/02/2017	Mere Sands Wood	24/02/2017
TV	Local	Filming with BBC North West Tonight	25/02/2017	Mere Sands Wood	25/02/2017
TV	Local	That's Lancashire	25/02/2017	Mere Sands Wood	25/02/2017
Radio	Local	BBC Radio Merseyside	25/02/2017	Mere Sands Wood	25/02/2017
TV	Local	Made in Liverpool	28/02/2017	Freshfield Dune Heath, Formby	29/02/2017

This has resulted in largely positive coverage, evidenced by the influx of queries about volunteering on the project. Lancashire Wildlife Trust has lost a handful of members due to undertaking grey squirrel control. However, this remains in single figures and is far outweighed by the 50+ people wanting to get involved with the project, not only from within the project area but also from other parts of Lancashire and Manchester.

8. *Sequential reduction in grey squirrel abundance, with completed biometric and other body condition databases, and parallel successful harvesting of blood and tissue samples by end of year 3.
Evidence of positive and progressive spatial and numerical increase in red squirrel population.*



In September 2016 at the start of the project, Ben Hope was employed as the Red Squirrel Ranger but he left the post in May 2017. The post was immediately re-advertised and Ryan Greenwood started in post in July 2017. After a short induction period he settled quickly into the role. During November 2016 and October 2017, 306 grey squirrels have been culled as a result of the Ranger post throughout all 4 priority areas of Scarisbrick, Little Crosby, Southport and Formby. Data is submitted to Newcastle University monthly along with information on the sex, age and breeding condition of the squirrel.

Figure 6 shows the number of grey squirrels culled in woodlands by the Red Squirrel Ranger and volunteers between November 2016 and October 2017, in 1km x 1km squares.

The Red Squirrel Ranger began the tissue sampling of culled grey squirrels in September 2017. The samples are currently being stored in a freezer until they can be sent to Animal Plant and Health Agency for analysis. As sampling has just begun there is a backlog of carcasses to dissect. To ensure this doesn't take time away from the Ranger carrying out grey squirrel control we hope to use Universities to undertake these dissections as practical experience for students on relevant courses.

The bi-annual monitoring program is undertaken every spring and autumn in March and October with the help of over 30 volunteers. This enables us to track changes in red and grey squirrel distribution in standardised way. Figures 7 and 8 show the results of spring 2017 and autumn 2017 results respectively. Figures 9 and 10 show the distribution of recorded red and grey squirrel sightings respectively during 2017, compiled from public sightings, grey squirrel control data and monitoring data.

These maps show that red squirrel distribution has remained largely stable during this time with red squirrels present throughout the stronghold, although the majority of the population is still concentrated in the coastal woodlands.

Grey squirrel presence is still recorded throughout the entire stronghold. However, it is important to note that these maps do not show grey squirrel density or numbers but only distribution. So only 1 grey squirrel in a 1km x 1km square will denote grey squirrel presence here.

Future Plans

A good base has now been developed for the project which we can build on over the next 2 years. We now know what events are most successful, how best to promote events and have a solid volunteer base. Over the next 12 months we will be focusing on



- Building on the success of first urban trap loan workshop and using this model to promote further workshops in 2 areas of Southport (Birkdale and Churchtown), Scarisbrick and Maghull.
- Encouraging landowners to take more responsibility for grey squirrel control on their land. Although this will present new challenges of collecting high quality data to submit to Newcastle University it will increase the sustainability of the project beyond LIFE funding.
- Taking steps towards the urban trap loan scheme becoming fully volunteer led. This will be through handing over co-ordination of the scheme to volunteers.
- Train students in collecting tissue samples from grey squirrel carcasses to reduce backlog.
- Utilising the volunteer base in continuing work with schools, with both making contact and also delivering workshops. Some of the project volunteers are qualified teachers and have connections with local schools or are willing to deliver sessions.
- Building on success of Facebook page and increasing social media presence by also setting up an Instagram account.

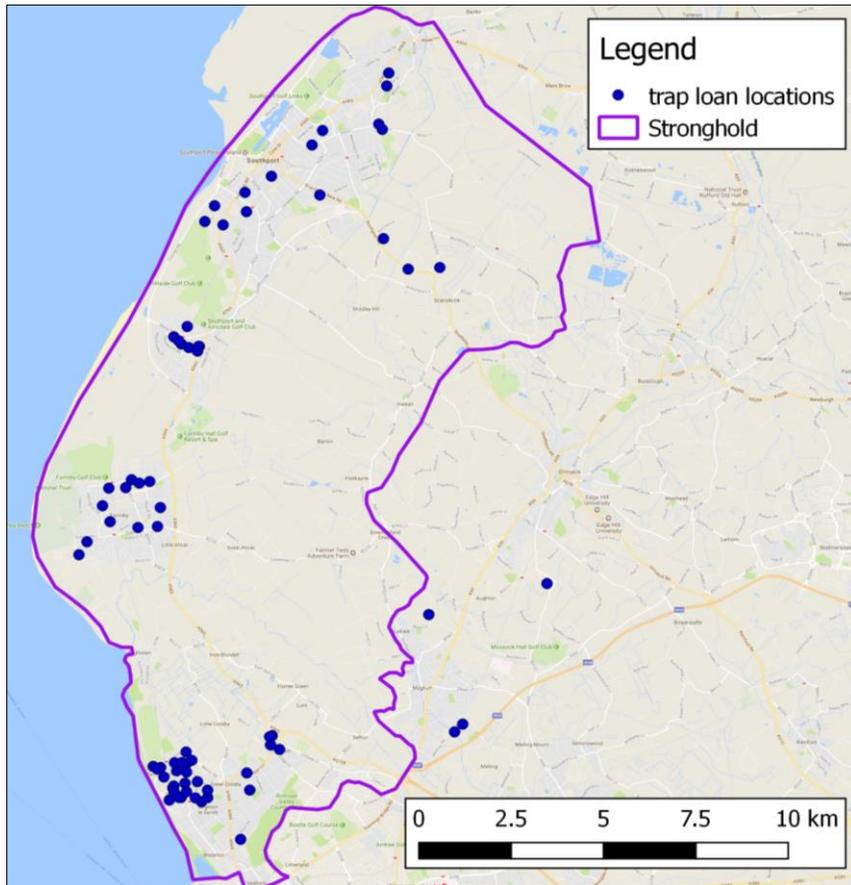


Figure 1. Urban trap loan locations between September 2016 and November 2017.



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Figure 2. Community event at Botanic Gardens, Southport on



Figure 3. Hello Spring event at Lady Green Garden Centre, Thornton on 08/04/2017.



Figure 4. Squirrel activity session with St Luke's Church Primary School on 18/10/2017



Figure 5. First edition of Red Squirrel e-newsletter sent out in July 2017.

Red Squirrels United

We're proud partners in this new national project!

The Red Squirrels United project is the first UK wide network working towards the conservation of red squirrels locally!

To find out what we are doing here in Merseyside and Lancashire to help red squirrels thrive, [visit the Lancashire Wildlife Trust website](#).

Red Squirrels United will also be hosting an annual Knowledge Fair to enable volunteers, academics, rangers and conservation officers to get together and share information, experiences and best practice in red squirrel conservation.

To find out more, [visit the Red Squirrel United website here](#).



Follow us



S.O.S - Saved our Squirrels!

So far in 2017 we have rehabilitated and successfully released three juvenile red squirrels back into the wild.

A huge thank you goes to the volunteer group at Freshfield Dune heath for building an amazing squirrel release pen.

We would also like to thank both Village Vets and Parker & Crowther Vets in Formby for their help and expertise in caring for these injured and orphaned squirrels too.

You can read all about the rescue of one squirrel - Sebastian - by

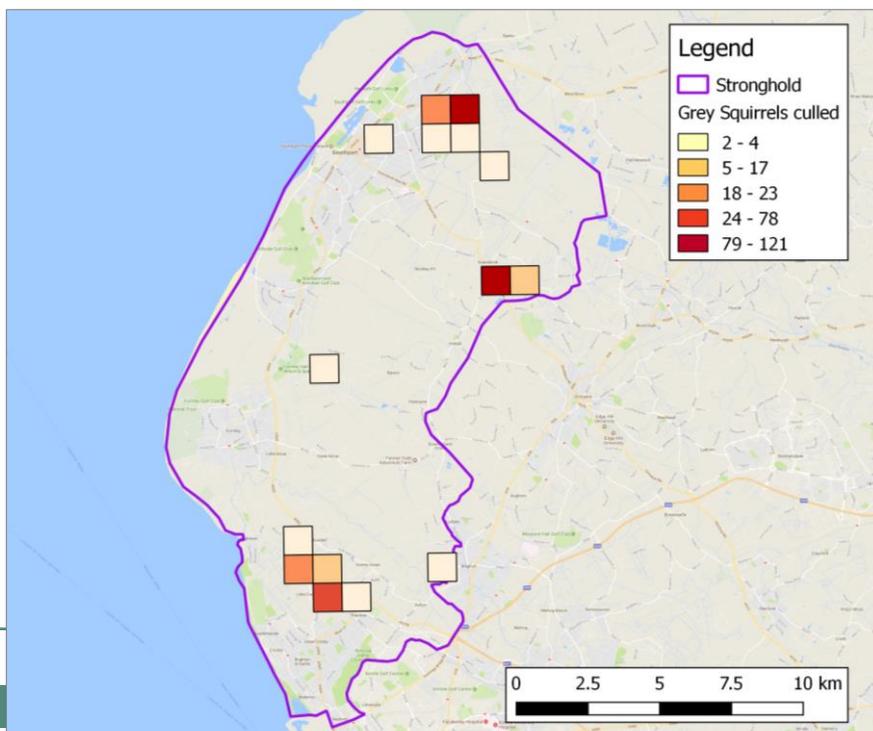
Red Squirrel Guided walks

21 August
Freshfield Dune Heath NR
10am-12pm

Come and learn all about the wonderful Red Squirrels at this FREE guided walk!

Led by our project officer, this walk will tell you all about out the work we are doing to save this much-loved and iconic creature... and hopefully we will see a few too!

Pre-booking is required **VISIT THIS PAGE** to learn how to do so.



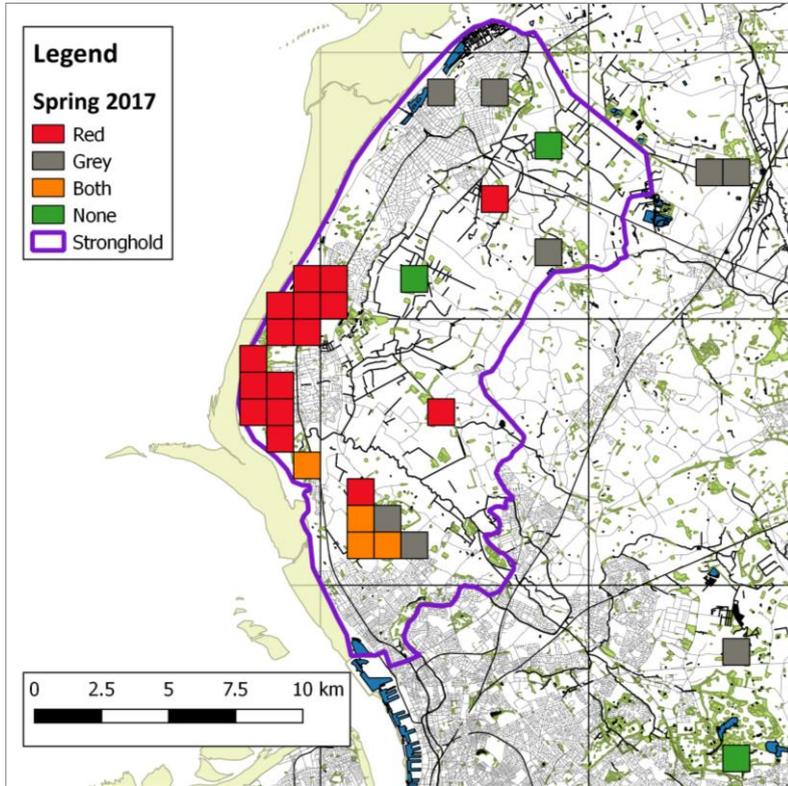


Figure 7. Spring 2017 standardised monitoring results in the North Merseyside and West Lancashire red squirrel stronghold. Map shows presence of red squirrels (red), grey squirrels (grey), both species (orange) and no squirrels in 1km x 1km squares.

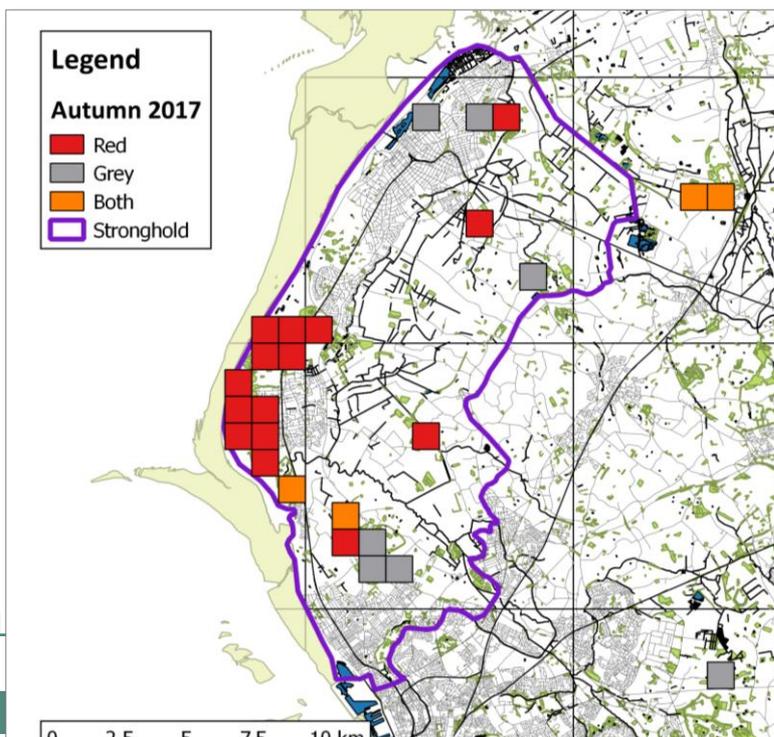


Figure 8. Autumn 2017 standardised monitoring results in the North Merseyside and West Lancashire red squirrel stronghold. Map shows presence of red squirrels (red), grey squirrels (grey) and both species (orange) in 1km x 1km squares.

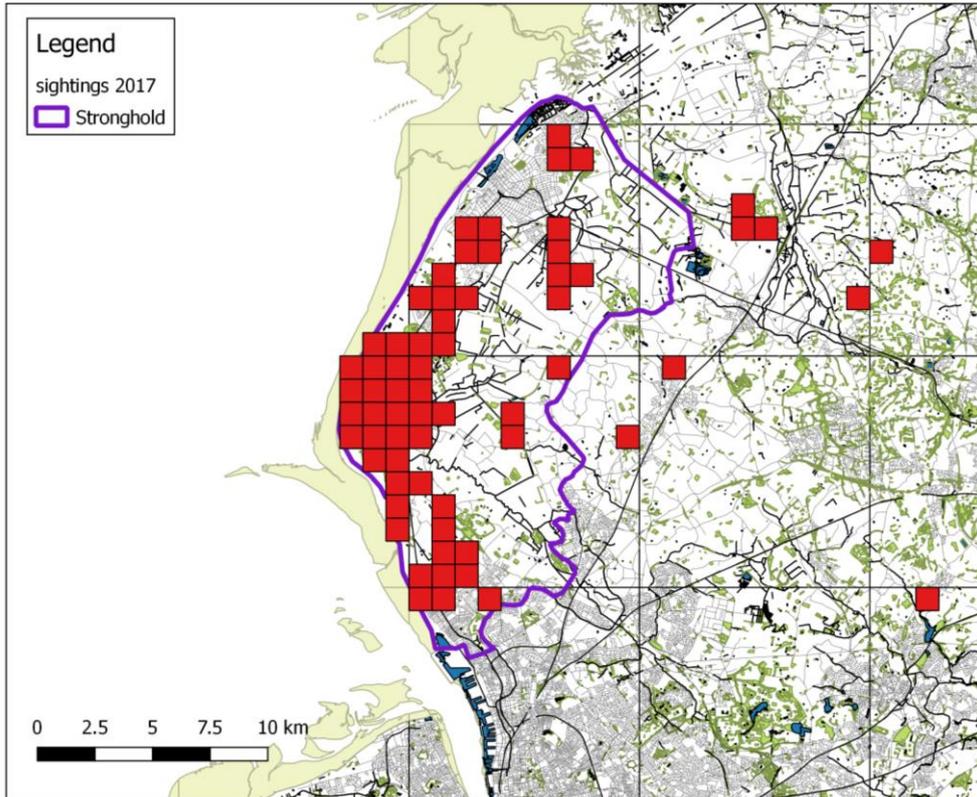


Figure 9. Red Squirrel distribution in 2017 compiled from public sightings, monitoring data and grey squirrel control data.

