



# Red Squirrels United

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Annual report on project activity  
Year two: Nov 2017 – Oct 2018



## Action C1 Urban IAS grey squirrel management in North Merseyside

### Executive Summary

Activities under Action C1 have continued throughout the North Merseyside and West Lancashire area, carried out by the Community Engagement Officer and Red Squirrel Ranger and supported by volunteers.

The Community Engagement Officer has run 20 events and workshops throughout the project area during this time to increase community awareness of the grey squirrel as a non-native invasive species and its impact on the red squirrel.

Red and grey squirrel sightings continue to be received from members of the public and all sightings and grey squirrel control data are recorded and shared with Newcastle University.

### 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.

### Expected results and Indicators.

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

During this period 103 dead red squirrels were recorded throughout the stronghold, 91 of which were in Formby. This is the highest number recorded since 2008 during the last major squirrel pox outbreak, when 149 dead red squirrels were recorded.



Many of the carcasses collected showed no outward signs of disease but 5 cases of squirrel pox virus were confirmed in Formby through testing. Records were collected from throughout the urban area and woodlands of Formby (see Figure 1) but the biggest impact has been seen in the southern end of Formby. The autumn 2018 bi-annual monitoring results showed a sharp decline in red squirrel numbers in this area but the population throughout the rest of Formby remains stable and has even increased in Ainsdale.

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

182 grey squirrel sightings were reported by members of the public and 81 grey squirrels were culled on the trap loan scheme by 11 volunteers throughout Formby, Ainsdale, Crosby, Southport, Maghull and Lydiate during this time period.

This year the Community Engagement Officer has spent a great deal of time supporting and advising the local volunteer group on their journey to become a self-sustaining constituted group. This structure will enable the group to be more proactive. The urban trap loan scheme is one of the groups priority's so this should continue to develop and expand over the next year.

*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.*

A lot of staff time and resources have gone into dealing with the large number of dead red squirrels reported this year due to the potential for a disease outbreak. The Community Engagement Officer ran 2 workshops for volunteers on dealing with sick and dead red squirrels to ease the pressure on staff time. 13 volunteers from throughout the project area attended the training and there is now a functional network of volunteers able to deal with reports of sick and dead red squirrels. Equipment has been provided for the volunteers and is stored at various accessible locations.

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

In addition to the two workshops there have been a further 18 events during this reporting period, engaging 942 people including 422 children (see Figures 2 - 5). These include:

- 6 talks for local groups in Southport, Formby and Crosby
- third party events with Sefton Council and National Trust, as well as with local businesses such as vets.
- 1 guided walk



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

To date, the Community Engagement Officer has worked with schools in Crosby and Southport. This year has the officer has continued to work with Myerscough College in Preston as well as engaging students from 2 local universities.

- Squirrel monitoring workshop with Myerscough College at Ainsdale National Nature Reserve on 27/06/2018.
- Student placement from Myerscough College (Animal Studies) for 2 weeks from 26/02/18. Placement focused on monitoring methods including hair tube surveys, trail cameras and visual transects.
- Student placement from University of Liverpool (Veterinary Science), March – May 2018. Placement included taking part in the bi-annual monitoring programme and undertaking tissue sampling of grey squirrels.

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

Social media presence has been increasing throughout the project. As of May 2018 the page has 1605 followers.

We now have 115 subscribers to the quarterly e-newsletter and this continues to increase.

We did intend to also set up an Instagram account for the project but as the Red Alert group will now also start to create an online presence through social media it was decided they would be better placed to promote the project through this medium to avoid duplication and confusing the public.

6. *12 local media hits over 3 years (newspaper/local radio/northwest news) resulting in positive press coverage.*

The project has been promoted through various media channels, including national radio and local newspapers. These are detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Summary of media hits between November 2017 and October 2018.



Media type	National or Local coverage	Description	Date filmed	Location	Date aired
Radio	National	BBC Radio 4	01/11/2017	Freshfield Dune Heath, Formby	07/12/2017
TV	National	Sky News	13/06/2018	National Trust Formby	Did not air
Newspaper	Local	Formby Champion	18/16/2018	Interview over phone	27/06/2018
Membership magazine	Local	LWT Lapwing	29/06/2018	Freshfield Dune Heath, Formby	October 2018

- 7. 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.*

Figure 6 shows the locations of grey squirrel control effort and the number culled in each area by the Red Squirrel Ranger and volunteers between November 2017 and October 2018, in 1km x 1km squares. This data is submitted to Newcastle University monthly along with information on the sex, age and breeding condition of the squirrel.

Tissue samples have been taken from 109 of the 270 grey squirrels culled during this period. The samples are currently being stored in a freezer until they can be sent to Animal Plant and Health Agency for analysis. We have been successful in recruiting students and volunteers to undertake the dissections to minimise pressure on staff time.

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 a standardised way. Figures 7 and 8 show the results of spring 2018 and autumn 2018 results respectively. Figures 9 and 10 show the distribution of



recorded red and grey squirrel sightings respectively during 2018, 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

Over the final year of the Action C1 we will be focusing on:

- Supporting Red Alert group. This will be a key focus for the Community Engagement officer and is vital for the sustainability of the project. Key areas will be ensuring the group are equipped to manage the trap loan scheme and deliver education and community engagement events.
- Continue encouraging landowners to take more responsibility for grey squirrel control on their land. This will be a key focus for the Red Squirrel Ranger who will also work closely with the Red Alert group to put them in touch with landowners and fill gaps in control efforts.
- Continue to train students in collecting tissue samples from grey squirrel carcasses and submit full quota of samples to APHA.

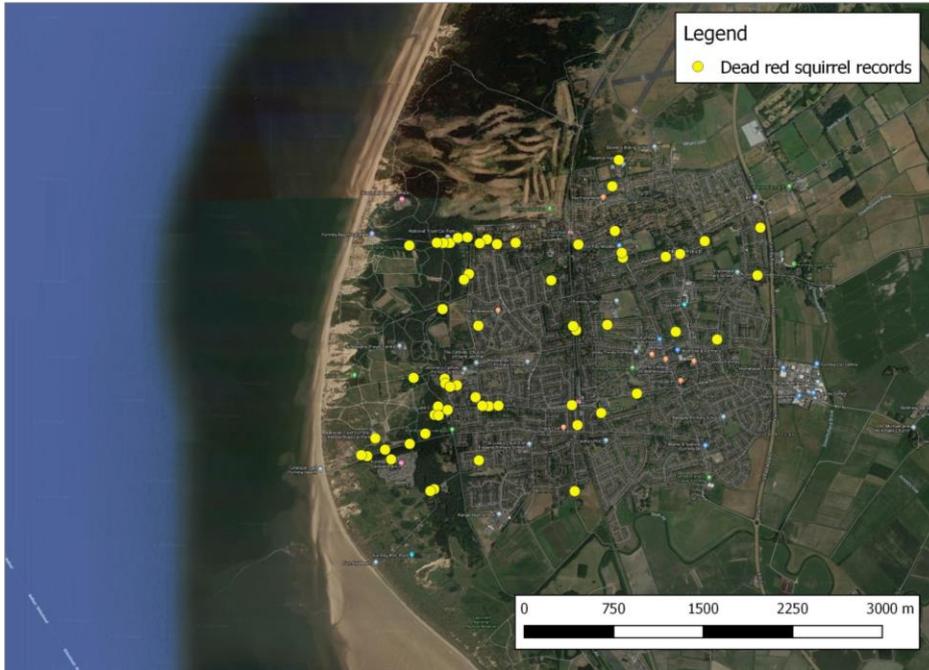


Figure 1. Map showing dead red squirrel records in Formby in 2018.



Figure 2. Christmas in the Park, Botanic Gardens, Southport. 10.12.2017



Figure 3. Red Squirrel Fun Day, National Trust Formby. 15.02.18



Figure 4. Liverpool World Museum, 15.08.2018



Figure 5. Halloween event, Bank Hall. 28.10.2018

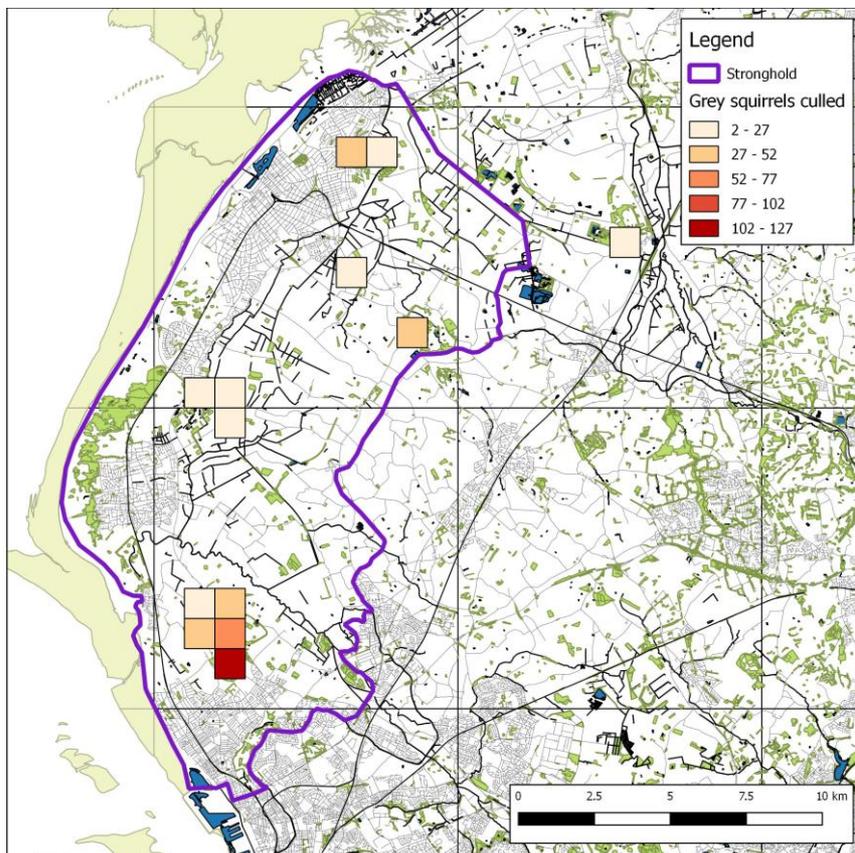


Figure 6. Grey squirrel control undertaken in woodlands by Red Squirrel Ranger and volunteers between November 2017 and October 2018.

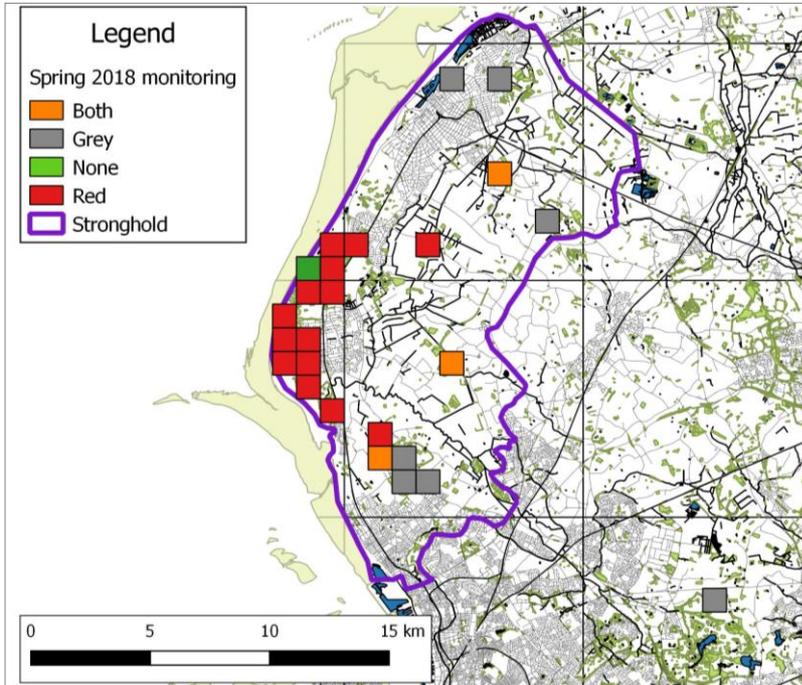


Figure 7. Spring 2018 standardised monitoring results in the North Merseyside and West Lancashire red squirrel stronghold. Map shows presence of red squirrels (red), grey squirrels (grey), both species (orange) and no squirrels (green) in 1km x 1km squares.

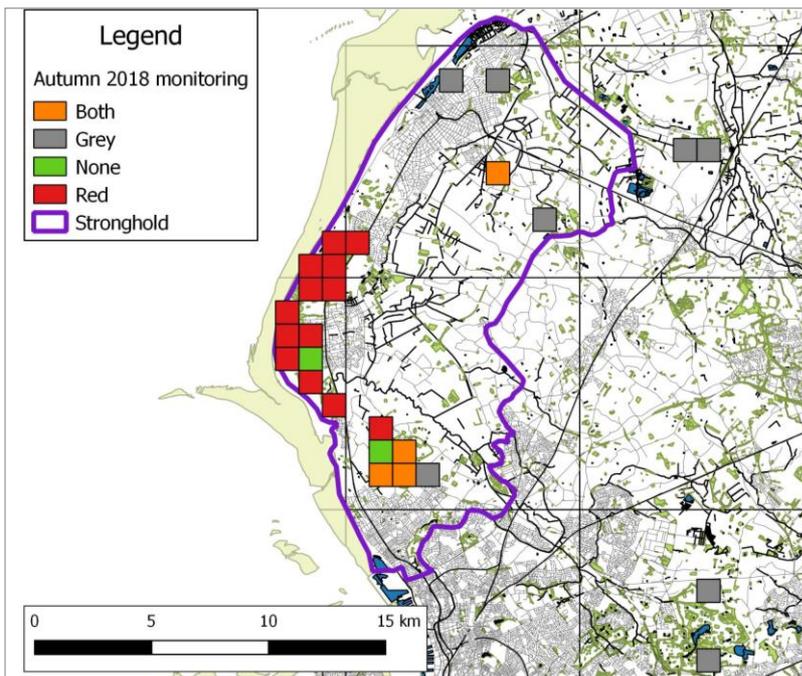


Figure 8. Autumn 2018 standardised monitoring results in the North Merseyside and West Lancashire red squirrel stronghold. Map shows presence of red squirrels (red), grey squirrels (grey), both species (orange) and no squirrels (green) in 1km x 1km squares.

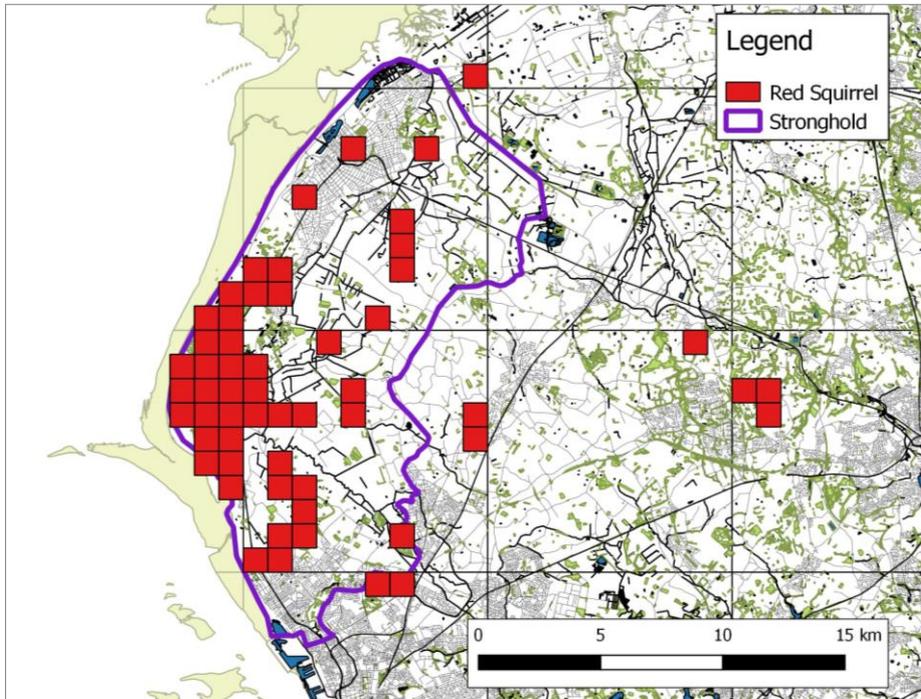


Figure 9. Red Squirrel distribution in 2018 compiled from public sightings, monitoring data and grey squirrel control data.

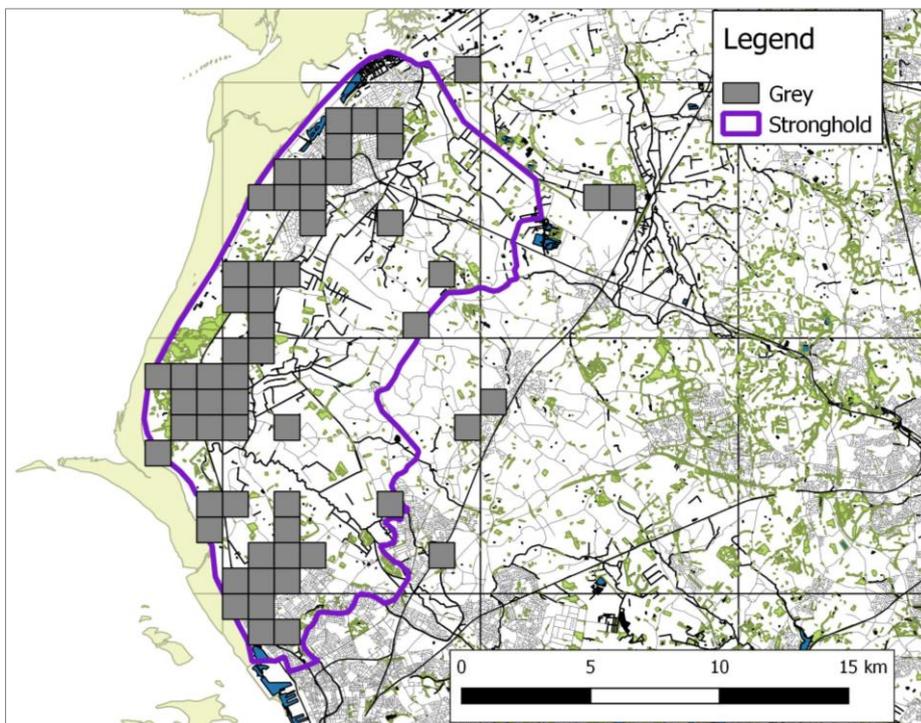


Figure 10. Grey Squirrel distribution in 2018 compiled from public sightings, monitoring data and grey squirrel control data.