



My volunteer journey

Chris Harris, volunteer with the [Mid Wales Red Squirrel Partnership](#) talks about what inspired him to get involved with red squirrel conservation and the importance of community engagement.



We moved as a family to The Cambrian Mountains, Mid - Wales in July 2007. From a young age I have had a great passion for wildlife. In 2008 I became involved in the development of Coed y Bont a 25-hectare community woodland at Pontrhydfendigaid. I have been Chairman of the group since 2017. I was carrying out a lot of research on the area and in 2006 and found that there was evidence of red squirrels in the Twyi Forrest. I wanted to find out more about

this and get involved in the conservation of the red squirrels in some way and in 2012 I got involved in the [Mammals in a Sustainable Environment](#) (MISE) project. I assisted with cone surveys near Tregaron and then in 2014 I assisted with red squirrel surveys in the same area, helping to check the live capture traps at weekends. I didn't see any red squirrels as most were caught during the week, but we did come across a polecat which was fantastic!.

I have attended grey squirrel control training courses and taken part in various courses for mammal ecology, monitoring and surveying, including dormouse, harvest mouse, water vole, mink and otter. I carry out annual surveys and monitoring of the dormouse boxes at Coed Y Bont and I have also been involved in both otter and pine marten surveys. In July 2019, I also assisted in further squirrel surveys and will be attending a squirrel handling course and conducting habitat and red squirrel surveys in the autumn 2019.

I joined the Mid Wales Red Squirrel Partnership in 2014 as the volunteer Coed y Bont co-ordinator. This has included co-ordinating a small group of volunteers, undertaking grey squirrel control, managing several camera traps above Strata Florida and organising talks and events involving the Red Squirrel Officer for Mid Wales. This has culminated in filming with Iolo Williams regarding volunteering in the Cambrian Mountains and





surveying red squirrels, which hopefully will be televised in spring 2020.



I have put a lot of time and effort to help the conservation of the red squirrel in the Cambrian Mountains. During this time, I have undertaken grey squirrel control and worked with a small group of volunteers in the Bont area. I have managed camera traps above Strata Florida since 2016, moving them several times, increasing the number and changing the way the camera traps were being used by finding chewed cones and pointing the cameras at them. However, it was not until May 2018 that I recorded the first red squirrels on camera. It was a fantastic feeling. The last pictures were logged in August 2019 and I have installed red squirrel nest boxes both above Strata Florida and in Coed Y Bont.

I believe that it is important to conserve, develop and encourage endangered species. Many of which have been cruelly exploited in the past and whose numbers have been decimated by human intervention, introduction of non-native species and habitat loss.

I believe that community engagement is very important, providing volunteers to assist in wildlife conservation, general support, passion and determination in ensuring that these projects work.

There are definite benefits to having community involvement and support in any project. It allows people in the community to learn more about wildlife and projects in the area, provides opportunities to obtain valid wildlife and conservation experience, and allows people to use their knowledge, skills and passion for wildlife in a worthwhile project.



As a volunteer for local conservation projects, I hope to continue and to get further involved in the conservation of mammals and wildlife in the Cambrian Mountains of Mid Wales. Conservation is so important, both for present times and for the future; to give back and try to right the wrongs that humans have made in the past.