

## Squirrel Facts:

- The earliest British fossil record of the Red Squirrel was 4542 years ago on the Isle of Wight but it is thought they date from 12,500 years ago.
- Red squirrels are native to most of Europe and some of Asia.
- Red squirrels were almost extinct in Scotland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to deforestation and were reintroduced from England and Italy between 1810 and 1848.
- Red Squirrels then benefitted from extensive woodland plantings, so much so that by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century they were considered a serious forest pest.
- Squirrel clubs were set up in some areas, the “Highland Forest Club” killed 82,000 red squirrels in the first 30 years of its existence.
- Between 1900 and 1920 Red squirrel numbers in the UK started to decline thought to be due to forest felling and disease.
- In 1876 the North American Grey squirrel was introduced to Henbury Park , Cheshire, as a “novelty”
- 9 further groups of American Grey squirrels were imported and released in places as diverse as Surrey and Ireland and there were 22 “translocations” where greys were moved from one part of the British Isles to another.
- Grey squirrel populations expanded rapidly and in 1936 in Oxfordshire they were described as “ a plague of voracious pests” in a letter to the Times
- The Grey Squirrels Order 1937 encouraged shooting of grey squirrels, 7000 squirrel clubs were formed, but despite killing over a million greys by 1958, failed to halt the expanding population.
- Grey Squirrels are a threat to our native Reds by carrying Squirrel pox which kills reds and leaves greys unaffected.
- Red squirrels average weight is about 250 g when mature whereas Grey squirrels average at 500g so the reds are out- competed for food sources
- Reds thrive in coniferous forest while greys are more often seen in deciduous woods
- The introduction of 2 breeding Grey squirrel pairs to Italy, and then translocation of Greys is now threatening the European population of Red squirrels.
- *But we are fortunate in the North- we still have some native Reds left and your local volunteers are doing their best to keep it that way!*

The current local situation is very changeable but we still have reds in Newton on the Moor, Swarland Woods, Wellhope and Thrunton. If any of you go regularly to the forest at Fram Gate up the old carriage road I would be grateful for any information from there.

We rely heavily on sightings to keep up to date, so please carry on with those and thank you to all who have phoned or emailed so far.

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