

**Prince of Wales backs mass sterilisation of grey squirrels
(Ben Webster, Article from The Times 24th Feb 2017)**

Prince Charles is supporting government-backed plans to sterilise grey squirrels in order to protect native reds and save millions of broadleaf trees. Greys carry the squirrel pox virus which is fatal to reds, but also strip rings of bark from trees, exposing them to disease and causing them to die.

An oral contraceptive has been developed by APHA (the government's Animal and Plant Health Agency) in York which could be used on greys lasting several years, which could drastically reduce their population by an estimated 90%.

A five year programme is needed to test and license the contraceptive, costing £1 million - £100,000 has been raised recently from supporters of the UK Squirrel Accord (Members include Forestry Commission, National Trust, Woodland Trust).

Trials would involve concealing the contraceptive in chocolate spread, which would be put into specially designed traps with doors too heavy for red squirrels, voles or mice to open. The boxes would initially only be used in parts of the UK where there are no reds, but then could be used everywhere once refined to ensure that only the heavier greys access the bait.

If money is forthcoming and trials are successful, the contraceptive could be deployed in five years.