



Lower Coquetdale Red Squirrels

Newsletter No 4 Winter 2021

We are all acutely aware of how dangerous a virus can be. The grey squirrel, introduced in the UK in the 1870's from Eastern North America, carries a virus which is lethal to our native red squirrels. Reds die within 15 days of the virus being passed to them, but the virus does not affect the greys. The red squirrel has been wiped out of most of England, with just some very small colonies now remaining. With help from our LCRS volunteers, some of the remaining red squirrels in England, live locally to our patch.

Autumn 2020 saw a bumper harvest of natural foods. Here in our locality, this kept most greys away from feeders and traps for much longer than usual. However December 2020 and January 2021 saw greys a lot more eager to take the bait and our volunteers have made amazing progress in reducing greys. They have spent hours checking traps daily, culling greys, regularly cleaning and disinfecting feeders and keeping them topped up with food. As well as constantly monitoring trail cameras to spot any greys which turn up! So overall, this has resulted in creating a lot more territory for our native reds to move into.

We are very fortunate in that we have not heard of any of our local reds contracting squirrel pox in 2020, although sadly there were two cases reported in Upper Coquetdale. Our small population of reds and those we are monitoring seem very healthy! Some of our adult reds successfully raised some kittens last year (Parent & kitten captured here by one of our volunteers). With local woods becoming available to them, these kittens, and those born in



the spring, stand an excellent chance of survival. It's not too many years ago that red squirrels were regularly seen in our area. With continued hard work, and a little luck, it may not be too many years before they are back!

Looking back on our group's figures from 2017 to 2020, each year has seen growing numbers of greys taken out by volunteers. Last year being a particularly successful one with

853 greys reported on our website having been removed from circulation in the Coquet valley! Figures for sightings of reds have been stabilizing, with more or less equal numbers being recorded in 2019 and 2020. So we are hopeful that 2021 will be a very successful one for our local reds.

Nationally the UK government has given its support to a project to use oral contraceptives to control grey populations. Environment Minister, Lord Goldsmith, says the damage they and other invasive species cause to the UK's woodlands costs the UK economy £1.8 billion a year. He adds that the damage from squirrels also threatens the effectiveness of government efforts to tackle climate change by planting tens of thousands of acres of new woodlands.



On another note, do you want to attract red squirrels into your garden and would you like to buy hazel nuts for your squirrel feeders? If so, are you interested in our scheme to buy hazel nuts in bulk, thus making considerable savings? If the answer is yes, then do email Ian at imlakey@btinternet.com for more details.

LCRS Group volunteers continue to successfully remove greys from our woods and gardens. One satisfied resident has written "My garden is quiet again, the chaffinches and blackbirds, which were being chased away by greys, are now returning. You never know, perhaps one day I will have red squirrels again. Thank you for your help - the volunteers are doing a great job."

So **YOU** can help our cause by reporting any squirrels you see, red or grey, on our website www.lcreds.org.uk

Where possible and given sufficient volunteers, we will try to take action.

And you could join the Lower Coquetdale Red Squirrel Group (membership is free via the website). We would be delighted if you did, or to hear from you should you wish to get involved in any way with our group and its work to preserve the native red squirrel.

Cherry Hambrook
(Secretary)

PS All the photographs were taken by our volunteers working in the locality.

