



Project Summary

Red Squirrels North England (RSNE) is a new red squirrel conservation partnership project that combines, and builds on, the efforts of previous and current red squirrel conservation initiatives in order to protect red squirrel populations in the North of England through targeted and strategic conservation actions.

1 Project Background

The Red Squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*) is a priority species for conservation in the UK. Its dramatic decline in the UK the last century has been attributed to the introduction and spread of the North American Grey Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*), both through direct competition for resources as well as disease-mediated competition with the grey squirrel acting as a reservoir for the Squirrelpox virus (SQPV). Red squirrels are now extinct over much of mainland England and Wales. The stronghold of red squirrels is in northern England (Cumbria, Northumberland and Merseyside) and in Scotland. However, despite past and ongoing attempts to conserve red squirrels, their range is continuing to decline even in these areas. Any attempt to conserve red squirrels in their current distribution must include adequate grey squirrel control as the most critical component.

The Red Squirrel North England Project follows on from the Review of Red Squirrel Conservation Activity in Northern England (Natural England Commissioned Report 2009, NECR019)

The findings of this Review highlighted three main problems which are currently impacting on red squirrel conservation work in northern England and contributing to a continued uncertainty as to their long term presence in the region:

- 1) Lack of funding to support the current 'reserve strategy' especially with regard to systematic grey squirrel control;
- 2) Fragmentation of effort and a lack of a joined up, co-ordinated strategic direction;
- 3) Public dissonance between 'official' organisations.

Without strategic, targeted and properly resourced grey squirrel control, there is little doubt that red squirrels will eventually become extinct in northern England. Grey squirrel control effort is currently provided by volunteer Squirrel Groups, individual

volunteers, private landowners such as Whinfell Centre Parcs and the 'Save our Squirrels' project. There have been some local success stories, however due to the lack of funding for control efforts, grey squirrels are continuing to expand their range and red squirrel populations remain under threat from grey squirrel displacement. Additional support for grey squirrel control is required from government agencies and conservation organisations. This would involve support in terms of grey squirrel control on the ground, funding for local grey squirrel control efforts and co-ordination of efforts to ensure targeted and strategy control.

2 North England Red Squirrel Conservation Framework

A North England Red Squirrel Conservation Framework was produced in June 2010 which identifies key organisations involved in red squirrel conservation in North England and proposes the establishment of a single project. This single project would encompass all red squirrel conservation work and seek to deliver a consistent approach across north England. Some key points from the Framework in regards to the proposed single project include:

- The geographical area covered by the project is Cumbria, Northumberland, Lancashire and the north-western corner of North Yorkshire.
- TWT, NE, FC, RSST & NRS/Local Groups will contribute funds and/or resources to identified elements of the project.
- The project will have an initial duration of five years.
- The project approach will be stronghold¹ based but landscape scale.
- Government agency resources for grey squirrel control will be focussed on strongholds.
- Other organisation will consider strongholds as well as the wider landscape

Red Squirrels North England has been developed to deliver this single project encompassing all red squirrel conservation work.

3 Project Aims

Red Squirrels North England aims to address the problems identified by the Review of Red Squirrel Conservation Activity Report by ensuring the following.

- A co-ordinated strategy which focuses effort, funding and information in one place and although led by statutory agencies is inclusive of and subscribed into by all relevant agencies and voluntary groups working on squirrels in Northern England.
- A strategy which is inclusive of all major components of squirrel conservation (control, conservation and community engagement) in a balanced proportion and backed up by a thorough, fit for purpose, evidence based, monitoring system.
- A reserve based strategy underlain with landscape-scale squirrel control where appropriate.

¹ 'Stronghold' refers to the original Red Squirrel Refuge Sites including their buffers. See Figure 1 for a map of Red Squirrel Strongholds in North England.

4 Project objectives

Objective 1: Facilitate the continued persistence, and wherever possible, increase of red squirrel populations within Strongholds by halting the spread of grey squirrels within strongholds and minimising the incursion of grey squirrels into Strongholds.

Objective 2: Reduce the rate of grey squirrel expansion across the wider project area where it benefits red squirrel populations.

Objective 3: Obtain a clear understanding of the effort of grey squirrel control required to allow red squirrels to increase their populations and expand their range. In addition, determine mechanisms for delivering this in a way which is sustainable in the longer term.

The objectives will be achieved by focusing on one overarching outcome and three specific outcomes:

- Overall Outcome: The conservation of red squirrels follows a joined up and co-ordinated strategic direction, resourced effectively and inclusive of all organisations.
- Outcome 1: Grey Squirrel Control
- Outcome 2: Monitoring and Surveillance
- Outcome 3: Sharing Best Practice and Communications

5 Project Timing

Red Squirrels North England (RSNE) is a five year project running from October 2010 – October 2015. The first year of the project contained a development phase formulating working methods and partnerships while continuing current red squirrel conservation efforts. A Project Manager is now in post and will oversee the delivery phase from 2011-14.

6 Project Partners

The Wildlife Trusts (TWT), the Red Squirrel Survival Trust (RSST), Forestry Commission (FC) and Natural England (NE) initiated the RSNE Project in co-operation with Northern Red Squirrels. The project aims to be inclusive of all organisations, key stakeholders and individuals. Potential partners have the option of signing up to RSNE through a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA).

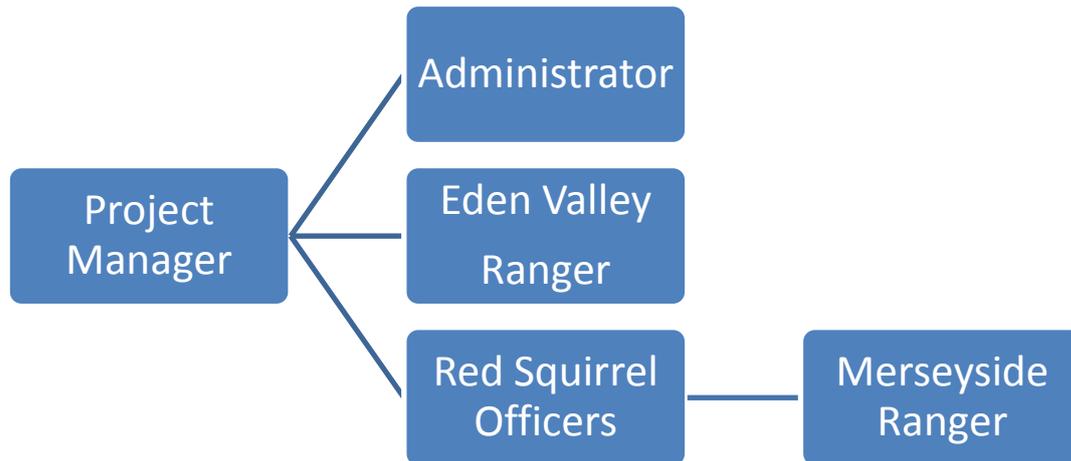
7 Project Team

The project team is headed by the Project Manager employed by the Red Squirrel Survival Trust, based in the Wildlife Trust offices and initially funded through Natural England and Forestry Commission. These organisations form a Project Management Group to whom the Project Manager reports.

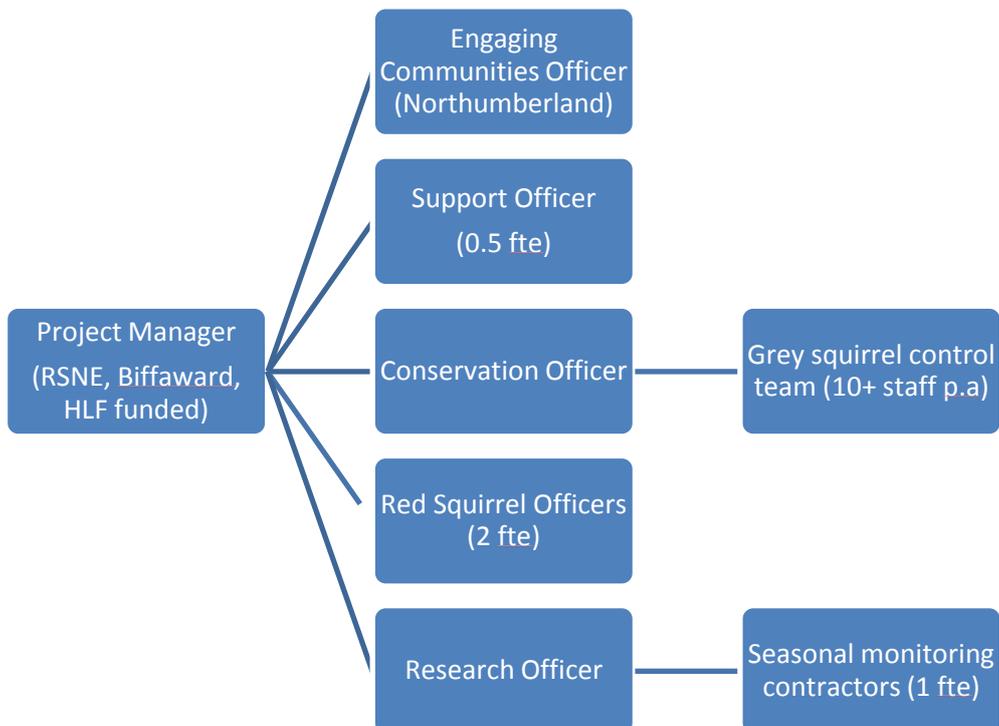
The Project Manager will oversee the project team, created as delivery funding is secured. Both current and potential future team structures are detailed below:

Project Team Structure:

April to December 2011



January 2012 to December 2014



Additional staff may be recruited for people engagement and education projects later in the programme if needs are clarified and external funding sourced.

Allocation of resources for conservation measures will be undertaken on a priority basis, ensuring that each Stronghold is adequately covered before moving to the next stronghold. This approach however should not prevent area specific funding opportunities to be pursued. As the stronghold with the largest and most sustainable red squirrel population, the Kielder Stronghold Complex (simply referred to as Kielder Stronghold) will act as a flagship Stronghold with resources initially predominantly allocated here. The priority of the remaining Strongholds will be determined as part of Review of Strongholds (contract to be let by FC).

Team roles from year 2 onwards are as follows:

Project Manager: The leadership role within the project. Oversees, manages and co-ordinates all elements of the project and is the main interface with partner projects and organisations.

Conservation Officer: Ensures and coordinates the delivery of the project within the stronghold with particular emphasis on the grey squirrel control strategy as well as land-owner liaison.

Research Officer: Implements the monitoring strategy and oversees the independent, scientific analysis of data.

Red Squirrel Rangers: Red Squirrel Rangers will be allocated specific patches within the strongholds, where they will undertake strategic grey squirrel control, facilitate strategic grey squirrel control by volunteers/landowners and co-ordinate the practical implementation of the grey squirrel control strategy on the ground. They will also be responsible for recording and providing data according to protocol to the Data & Monitoring Officer and may undertake some monitoring functions.

Assistant Red Squirrel Rangers: Part-time or full time grey squirrel control officers that support the Red Squirrel Rangers in undertaking grey squirrel control within specific, strategic areas. They will also record and provide data to the project and may undertake some monitoring functions.

Support Officer: Provides admin support to the Project Manager and the project.

Engaging Community Officers: Deliver the public engagement element of the project on a county basis including providing advice to the general public , landowners and volunteers out with strongholds.

The management structure for these posts is provided within the Project Team structure illustration for Year 2-5.

8 Project Outcomes and Actions

The project outcomes will be achieved through the following actions:

<p>Overall Outcome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The conservation of red squirrels follows a joined up and co-ordinated strategic direction, resourced effectively and inclusive of all organisations. • The overall outcome underpins the three specific outcomes. 	
<p>Overall Actions:</p> <p>(i) Maintain the current Project Management Group (TWT, RSST, FC and NE) which meets regularly and maintains a close, open and positive working relationship.</p>	<p>Measures of Success:</p> <p>Quarterly meetings of the PMG for the first year followed by bi-annual meetings for subsequent years.</p>
<p>(ii) Set up a Project Advisory Group with a wider membership in particular involving Northern Red Squirrels and Local Group representatives.</p>	<p>Establishment of the PAG, followed by bi - annual meetings.</p>
<p>(iii) Identify, and secure, the funding required to implement red squirrel conservation efforts, in particular in relation to grey squirrel control within strongholds.</p>	<p>PMG agreement on level of funding required and identification of funding sources by end of year 1. Funding obtained for subsequent years.</p>

Outcome 1: Grey Squirrel Control

- The conservation of red squirrels is achieved through the control of grey squirrels within the strongholds, backed up with appropriate landscape scale control where necessary.
- Grey squirrel controllers from all partner organisations are appropriately trained, are supportive of and are supported by the strategy.
- The grey squirrel control strategy will be evidence based, with regular revision as control and monitoring data becomes available.

Outcome 1: Actions	Measure of success:
(i) Agreed a Conservation Delivery Plan with PMG and PAG	Plans are fit for purpose.
(ii) Develop detailed grey squirrel control management plans for each of the strongholds.	Plans are fit for purpose.
(iii) Appointment of Conservation Officer, Red Squirrel Officers and Rangers	New team recruited and inducted.
(iv) Establish new WGS agreements in annual focus zones, enabling new control activity and monitoring to come on stream each year	New agreements organised and financed to the satisfaction of agreement holders, delivery partners and FC.
(v) In conjunction with other partners (in particular NRS/Local Groups), implement the management plans using volunteer/ landowner effort and funding from FC/NE, Local Group Control Fund and other funding sources.	Partner organisations contributing strategically to the stronghold management plans.
(vi) Record grey squirrel control effort and numbers controlled in a standardised way. Assess the impact of grey squirrel control efforts on red squirrel conservation (see Outcome 2).	Development of standard protocols by end of year 1. Adoption of protocols by partner organisation in subsequent years.

Outcome 2: Monitoring & Data Management

- A long-term monitoring strategy is established which will gain sufficient information to assess the effectiveness of red squirrel conservation efforts throughout, and ideally beyond, the duration of this project.
- Evaluation of effectiveness of the conservation effort is regularly fed back into the strategy to inform future conservation efforts.
- The recorded information is collated efficiently into a single data holding body and will be regularly disseminated and made available to all stakeholders.

Outcome 2: Actions	Measure of success:
(i) Agree a monitoring plan with PMG/PAG that assess the change in red and grey squirrel distributions and records grey squirrel control effort, success and impact.	Agree a plan that is fit for purposed and can be delivered with the available resources.
(ii) Appoint a Research Officer	Appointment by Jan 2012.
(iii) Agree and implement a research plan, including Ambassador sites for detailed studies.	Research plan agreed by PMG/PAG and implemented by June 2012.
(iv) Implement the monitoring plan with all partners contributing records.	Adoption of monitoring protocol and submission of data by all partners.
(v) Development of a central recording database.	Development of a central recording database by end of year 1.
(vi) Maintenance and regular updates of the central recording database.	Maintenance and at least quarterly updates of the database.
(vii) Regular analysis of data and incorporation of findings into the strategies.	Annual data analysis and review of strategy by March of each year.
(viii) Regular dissemination of data summaries and maps to stakeholders and the wider public.	Details and frequency of dissemination to be determined by end of year 1.

Outcome 3: Partnership Working and Sharing Best Practise

- The provision of advice and training on grey squirrel control and habitat management is supportive of the strategy and targeted appropriately.
- The public engagement and communication aspect of the project is supportive of the strategy and targeted appropriately.
- Publicity measures are considered, appropriate and inclusive.

Outcome 3: Actions	Measure of success:
(i) There will be a proactive, strategic engagement with landowners to facilitate the smooth delivery	RSNE regularly shares control

of the project.	and monitoring information with new and existing land manager groupings
(ii) Support existing Local Squirrel Groups and facilitate the development of new Local Squirrel Groups in order to provide a complete Local Group coverage of all strongholds.	Existing groups supported effectively and new groups grown in areas of need (e.g. Northumberland in 2012).
(iii) Undertaken broader public engagement activities including schools work as needs and funding are identified	Broader engagement is consistent with the conservation needs of RSNE.
(iv) Maintain a project website that is regularly updated and effectively signposts and informs all parties involved in red squirrel conservation.	Website is relevant and useful as a communication tool.
(v) Raise public awareness of the threats to red squirrels and the importance of conservation efforts.	The relevant media publish RSNE information.