



**Autumn Meeting**

**19 October 2017**

**Animal and Plant Health Agency, (APHA)**

**Sand Hutton, York**

**YO41 1LZ**

## **SUMMARY**

99 people attended the meeting – a healthy mix of foresters, squirrel volunteers and representatives of related organisations. It was good to meet several volunteers from red squirrel groups across the country as well as other 'movers and shakers'. Without exception, the presentations were informative and clear, with ample time for questions. All ably chaired by The Earl of Kinnoull, Chair of RSST and UK Squirrel Accord.

## **PRESENTATIONS**

- 1. *Fertility Control in Grey Squirrel Control - What do the next 5 years look like?* Presentation by **Giovanna Massei PhD, Senior Ecologist, Associate Editor of *Human-Wildlife Interactions*, National Wildlife Management Centre, Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA)****

Giovanna prefaced her presentation with a summary of lethal and non-lethal conflicts between humans and wildlife across the globe, noting that in an increasingly urbanized world, such conflicts are likely to grow.

An orally delivered contraceptive is essential, she argued, if the grey squirrel problem is to be tackled on the scale required. The project's objective is to develop and deliver the oral contraceptive over a five-year period at a cost of £1m by four research groups working collaboratively but based in UK (2 groups), France and USA.

The Programme team comprises 14 staff.

In summary the programme timetable is:

- **Year One:** Test novel contraceptive formulations; establish a system for monitoring feeding patterns; start a grey squirrel breeding colony.
- **Year Two:** Test dose rates (on rats); optimize bait uptake.
- **Year Three/ Four:** Test on squirrels in the lab; Calibrate bait uptake in rural and urban conditions; liaise with regulators on a regulations package; refine the model as part of an integrated programme of control.
- **Year Five:** Pilot trials; initiate trials for regulation purposes.

Part of the programme is to develop a grey squirrel-specific hopper. A prototype has been developed and is being tested with microchipped squirrels to assess feeding habits.

Giovanna described fertility control as an important, but not the only tool. A programme of awareness-raising about the cost, feasibility and safety implications will accompany the programme as it progresses.

**2. Traps... tried and tested. An introduction and update on what is happening in this world. Presentation by Julie Lane PhD. Deputy Head of Department, Ethics and Animal Welfare Consultant, National Wildlife Management Centre. (APHA)**

Julie noted that they now had 54 breeding greys on site. She summarised the various control methods currently or previously employed and the pros and cons of each:

- Warfarin (no longer used)
- Drey poking/ shooting
- Free shooting
- Live trapping
- Kill traps

All control has to comply with the Animal Welfare Act and the Agreement on International Humane Trapping Standards (though the latter only currently applies to stoats, badgers and pine martens). A number of kill traps are allowed under the Spring Trap Approval Order, which APHA test prior to Defra approval.

Julie also described progress with the Good Nature Squirrel Trap and the pros and cons of this multi-capture trap. Following modification (it is now the Good Nature 18 Squirrel Trap (previously 24)) the trap has been recommended to Defra for approval. This is expected by spring or summer 2018. Again Julie emphasised its potential role as part of an integrated programme of control – not a single ‘silver bullet’.

**3. Fertility Control in Grey Squirrel Control - Working together in the future. Presentation by Glen Graham, an experienced Red Squirrel Ranger – National Trust Wallington Hall, Morpeth.**

Glen described the transformation he'd achieved in restoring red squirrels and grey control in and around the Wallington Hall Estate. This had been achieved through intensive monitoring using feeders and hair traps, shooting and trapping, achievable due to his focussed attention and dedication to the work. He noted the challenges of securing engagement of neighbours whose grey havens beyond the estate boundary posed a threat, and welcomed the prospect of new control measures that could encourage other owners and add to his own 'arsenal'. Glen acknowledged that his approach was not currently replicated on other NT estates and that a broader and more supportive policy framework could provide a mandate for other property managers.

**4. Broadleaf Trees – a winning planting strategy - the RFS Perspective. Andrew Woods. President, Royal Forestry Society**

Andrew contrasted his experience as a young forester when 15 – 20 per cent of his time could legitimately be spent on grey control, with the situation for today's foresters. Moreover, deer were less of a problem then (though rabbits were); the Broadleaved Woodland Grant Scheme incentivised planting; and warfarin was available.

Grey squirrels remained a scourge of commercial woodland development, however, and control was an essential component of profitable management. More care was needed on species selection, not least to create more market options, and obligations should be placed on land managers to encourage active squirrel management using all the current and emerging tools in the toolbox.

**5. The English Woodland's Race for Survival. Presentation by Dr Charles Lane of FERA**

Charles noted the context of the Government's Plan Protection Strategy 2014 and the importance of harnessing public awareness and action through, for example, the Tree Health Early Warning System. He described various online channels for citizen science including [OPAL: Open Air Laboratories](#) and Observatree.

He exemplified several tree diseases which had been imported and then spread to other continents and how these manifested themselves.

Several are triggered in bark wounds, for example, so the threat posed by squirrel damage in accelerating the spread of tree diseases was obvious.

**6. 'The Yorkshire Arboretum, tree health and squirrels'  
Presentation by Dr. John Grimshaw, Director of the Yorkshire Arboretum  
at Castle Howard.**

John described the role of the Arboretum at Castle Howard (some 9 miles from Sand Hutton) as a diverse resource of species offering potential for disease resistance and resilience as well as a means of mitigating and adapting to climate change. He noted the value of volunteers and engagement with higher and further education groups and research bodies such as APHA. They are proposing a Tree Health Centre for awareness-raising, training and providing management recommendations.

They also propose a red squirrel enclosure based on the Escot Manor model in Devon.

**7. Wash up session for questions**

A concluding session of questions and discussion with the panel of speakers included:

- The pros and cons of pursuing a strategy of grey squirrel eradication as opposed to containment and reduction. Most felt eradication should be the clearly expressed goal, with lucid explanation of why that should be so to those audiences who vigorously oppose culling. Other felt there should be a more pragmatic approach given the scale of the problem. An estimate of 3.2 million greys in the UK was mooted though acknowledged that 'we don't really know'.
- Where a programme of fertility control would be targeted once the product becomes commercially available. No decisions have been made at this stage.
- The value of a 'stepping stones' approach in creating and then extending red squirrel havens.
- The risk of secondary effects on non-target species if the vaccine is taken. The hopper design programme is intended to remove this risk.

The meeting closed at 4.00pm.