



Westmorland Red Squirrels



Annual Review 2018



Welcome to the review of our activities in 2018. It was a year when the efforts of volunteers, contractors, supporting landowners and

organisational partners again proved crucial to the survival of our red squirrels. The number of greys removed was the highest since 2015 and there is a continuing need for vigilance and action. But we now have more people involved in grey control and reporting their figures, which is great. Red squirrel sighting reports were down but we were not unduly worried, as their range remains stable. Red squirrels can be very elusive; they were even before grey

squirrels arrived on the scene. While once we might have been concerned if red sightings dipped, we now know that available food supply can make quite a difference.

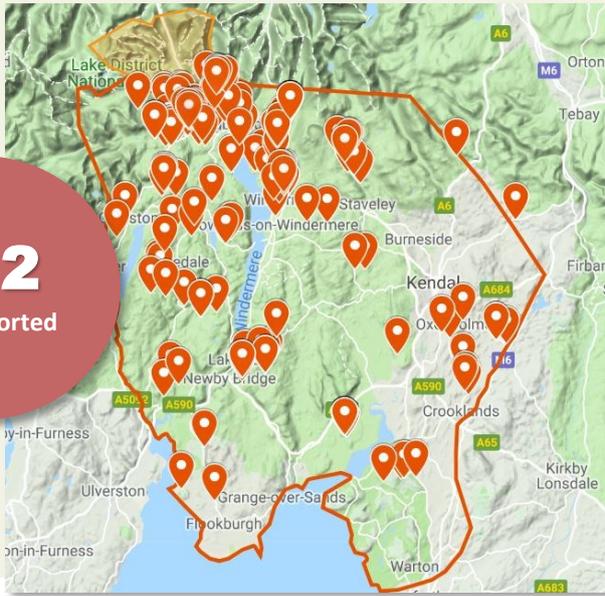
Please spread the word that our red squirrels remain; that they are even thriving in some areas; but that the situation is fragile. We need people to report their red sightings. Above all, we need people to care.

Geoff Hetherington, Chairman

Making the future safe for our red squirrels

2018 in a nutshell

Squirrels



312
reds reported



4691
greys caught

Events, meetings and publicity



We attended

23 meetings

15 internal meetings including trustees and management team meetings, and area steering group meetings

3 external meetings including one with Northern Red Squirrels Cumbria and two of the South Cumbria Squirrel Management Forum

2 conferences the UK Squirrel Accord in Perth, Scotland and the recorders' conference in Carlisle

3 media interviews with BBC Radio Cumbria and the Westmorland Gazette

We had a stand at
12
local events

 576 followers on twitter

 1,294 likes on Facebook

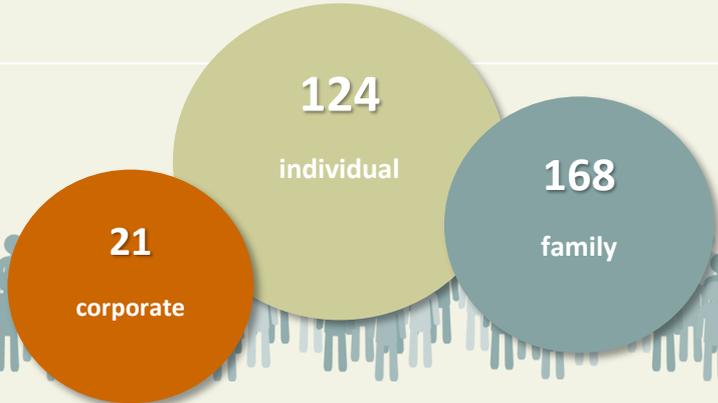
 295 subscribers to our E-News



5 talks
given to community groups

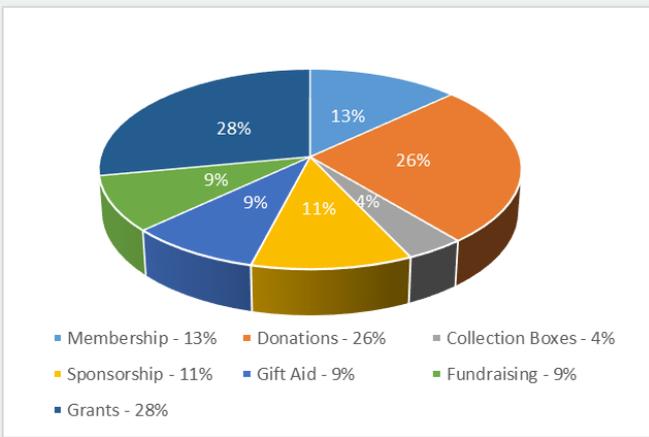
Members at the end of 2018

313 members

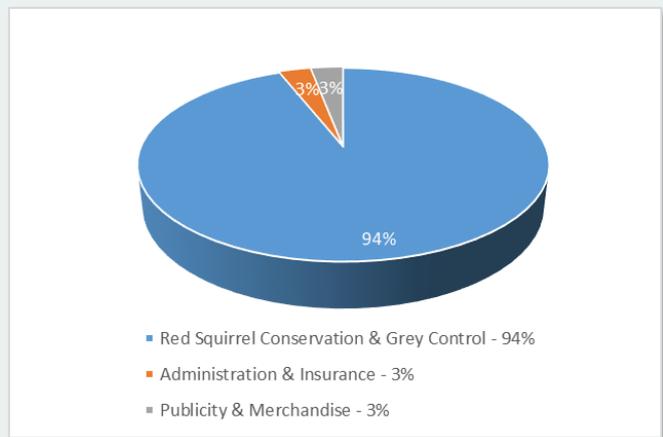


Financials for the 2018 calendar year.

Income

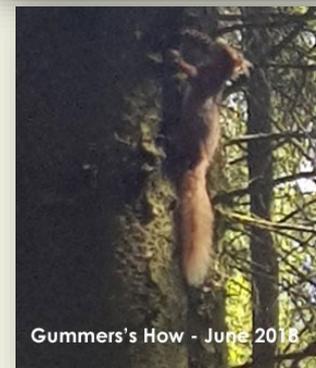


Expenditure



Our most recently published accounts for the financial year 2017/18 show income as £26,916 and expenditure as £32,696

Some of our 2018 reds



Ambleside and Langdale

The year began with a coordinated programme of grey squirrel control involving Red Squirrels Northern England rangers and volunteers from the neighbouring Grasmere red squirrel group. Thanks to funding from the Lake District National Park Authority's Community Fund, we were able to protect red squirrels that were threatened by squirrelpox virus spread by invading greys.

It is always great to receive photographic evidence of a red sighting. In early December Andy Phillips reported seeing two red squirrels in a field off the lane between Little Loughrigg and Skelwith Bridge and one more on the footpath around Loughrigg Tarn.



We're delighted to say that The Samling Hotel near Ambleside is the latest hotel to work with us on red squirrel conservation and support our efforts financially. We've started by setting up tester feeders in the hotel's grounds as we know reds have been spotted in neighbouring woodlands. Hopefully, it won't be long before the guests see reds running across the hotel's lawns.

Troutbeck

Red squirrels produced a second litter at the top of the Troutbeck valley in 2018 despite the challenging weather. Without the supplementary feeding they would possibly have struggled.

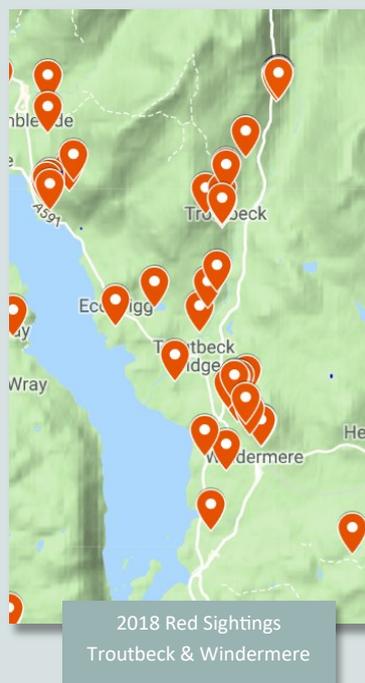
There have been red sightings lower down the valley too, near the post office, near the lake on a house roof and one on a balcony across the road from Brockhole. The lack of natural food helped with trapping lots of hungry greys.



At Troutbeck's Spring and Christmas Fairs we raised awareness about red squirrels and funds to support them.

Windermere

Our volunteers have removed a large numbers of greys since the beginning of the year and we are hopeful there will now be enough 'grey-free' territory to allow reds to live and breed here once again. There have been some 2018 red sightings, but the work to remove the constant flow of incoming greys has to continue apace otherwise these reds will be at risk. We need as much help as we can get if we are to see reds living here permanently once again.



AGM

Our packed AGM, in the wonderful surroundings of The Villa at Levens, heard about our recent activity and achievements. John Farmer, Chair of Cumbria Wildlife Trust, offered a vision of Cumbria's future, describing the challenges facing wildlife including a decline in insect populations, habitat degradation, invasive species, plant diseases and loss of EU subsidies. He also talked about some successes, such as naturally spreading otters, red kite and ospreys.

Two changes in officer responsibilities were agreed at the meeting, with Bob Cartwright elected Deputy Chair and Gail Armstrong as Secretary.

Fundraising

Once again, the Hare and Hounds at Levens generously hosted a fundraising evening in March, where the food was prepared by the bar staff and the bar tended by the chefs. The evening proved a great success with Cumbria Air Ambulance benefitting too. The £351.46 raised for us went directly towards red squirrel conservation. Many thanks to all at the Hare and Hounds!



Thanks go to all our corporate members and to our corporate sponsors: Holgates Caravan Parks in Silverdale, Logs Direct at Caton, the Lindeth Howe Hotel in Bowness-on-Windermere and WCF Pets and Equestrian in Kendal.

In 2018 we were pleased to welcome two new corporate sponsors: Skelwith Fold Caravan Park near Hawkshead and Langdale Leisure at Elterwater. Your support is invaluable.

Central Area

Ongoing work has kept grey numbers down, but we can't afford any let-up — so thanks to all those making the effort to keep this part of our area grey-free.

Red squirrels are still present in the Kentmere valley, but disappointingly

none were reported in Longsleddale during 2018. There were, however, several red sightings around the Oxenholme, Endmoor and Old Hutton areas. We don't know for sure, but we think these squirrels might have been dispersing from the red population around Killington. With no further reports, we assume they must have moved on again.



Red Squirrel Rescue

Sadly, in March we lost Bob Bradley, a former Westmorland Red Squirrels Trustee, our honorary veterinary officer and committed conservationist. Respected across the red squirrel world, Bob was the man to go to with an injured or orphaned squirrel. Bob would nurture the 'patient' back to full health in his red squirrel enclosure and, whenever possible, release it back into the wild. Bob developed and commissioned at his own expense an innovative 'red only' nest box and feeder. The Bradley box is still available to buy. Please contact the Secretary for details.

Following Bob's passing, our Secretary, Gail Armstrong, stepped up to co-ordinate any red squirrel rescues that might be needed.



Gail said,

"I have cared for sick and injured bats for 23 years. Injuries caused by

cats are the most common calls I deal with. If let out all night, domestic cats will hunt wildlife and they can cause severe injuries to bats without killing them. Often all I can do is perform a mercy killing. Bats become very conspicuous and easy to capture if they are unable to fly away so they are often easy to help with food, warmth, safety and time to heal. However, I bet you're thinking that any red squirrel that is easy to catch is probably already in a poor state. This is very true and is our hardest challenge when attempting to help them. The first rescue call I received in my new role was from Hawkshead where a red squirrel kit had been caught and injured by the householder's cat. The poor squirrel had a bad shoulder wound as well as obvious claw marks in the hind quarters and appeared to be dragging its back legs, so I took it to a local vet for advice. I was able to give it fluids and it eagerly ate a raspberry. I then spent a happy hour killing and picking maggots that had already hatched in the wounds. Sadly the vet examination revealed that it had no feeling in the hind legs and it was euthanized as there was little hope of recovery.

The second rescue call was for suspected squirrel pox. It was important to try to remove the sick squirrel before it infected others and

we were lucky to capture it whilst it was resting up in a bird box. Following a quick phone call I was on my way to see the vet at Kendal College Animal Rescue Centre (ARC).



I spent a sad but interesting afternoon cleaning the lesions on a sedated squirrel. It was given antibiotics, fluids and a vitamin booster and then left in a dark, quiet room to rest. It seemed to rally a little at first, eating some hazelnuts and blackberries overnight but it deteriorated the next day and was euthanized to prevent more suffering. The corpse was sent to the Animal & Plant Health Agency in Penrith for tests which confirmed the sad news of a squirrel pox casualty.

Kendal College's policy is that no grey squirrels will be accepted into the ARC and they are very keen to work with us on red squirrel rescues."

If you come across a red squirrel that is alive but needs help call Gail on 01524 701316 or 07917 021073.

Witherslack & Grange

This year we had photographs of red squirrels at **six** distinct locations in the south of our area: at Foulshaw; near the National Trust's Fell Foot Park; at Staveley-in-Cartmel; on the Holker Estate; at Gummer's How; and in the Simpson Ground plantation. Red

sightings at these locations are not unusual, but to have them on camera demonstrates that the southern range of our red squirrel population remains stable. This is thanks in no small part to the efforts of our volunteers and rangers to keep grey squirrel numbers as low as possible in order that the reds can thrive.



Staveley-in-Cartmel reds by Oliver Livesey

Northern Red Squirrels

There are 13 other red squirrel groups across Cumbria, all working to protect our red squirrels. This year we collaborated to promote the calendar and its messages about red squirrel conservation. Our allocation of 100 calendars sold like hot cakes and we hope to sell many more in 2019 for 2020.



UK Squirrel Accord

Bob Cartwright, our Deputy Chair, is a co-opted member of the UK Squirrel Accord's Executive Committee. The Accord-sponsored five-year Grey Squirrel Fertility Control Project continues to produce promising results. Having confirmed the fertility of the captive greys and the methodology for monitoring breeding and feeding patterns, Year Three's research programme has been agreed, which will begin to test the orally delivered vaccine and prepare the ground for field trials.

The Committee's Red Squirrel Conservation sub-group has started work on a draft protocol for captive breeding and release of red squirrels and will also be working with Defra on a draft red squirrel strategy for England, which would be instrumental to the delivery of the Government's 25-year Environment Strategy.



Rusland

After very high numbers of squirrels being trapped in June the increased amount of wild food available to the greys saw a sharp decline in the number entering traps during the remainder of the year. We saw evidence of greys feeding on unripe hazel nuts and other canopy food and largely avoiding the traps.

Logs Direct continued to support our work in the Rusland Valley. This year they donated £818.51p raised from their customers and even took the message to a major show at the NEC in Birmingham. Thank you!



Funding from the Heritage Lottery has meant that we have been able to buy two new display banners to use at shows, talks and other events.

By the end of the year we were finalising educational and interpretation material with the Forestry Commission at the Grizedale Visitor Centre to engage young

people and encourage more red squirrel sightings. Thanks to a grant from the Rawdon-Smith Trust we have purchased a number of wildlife cameras for use around Coniston and we will deploy some to support the Rusland's Reds project on the east side of Coniston, particularly around Brantwood.

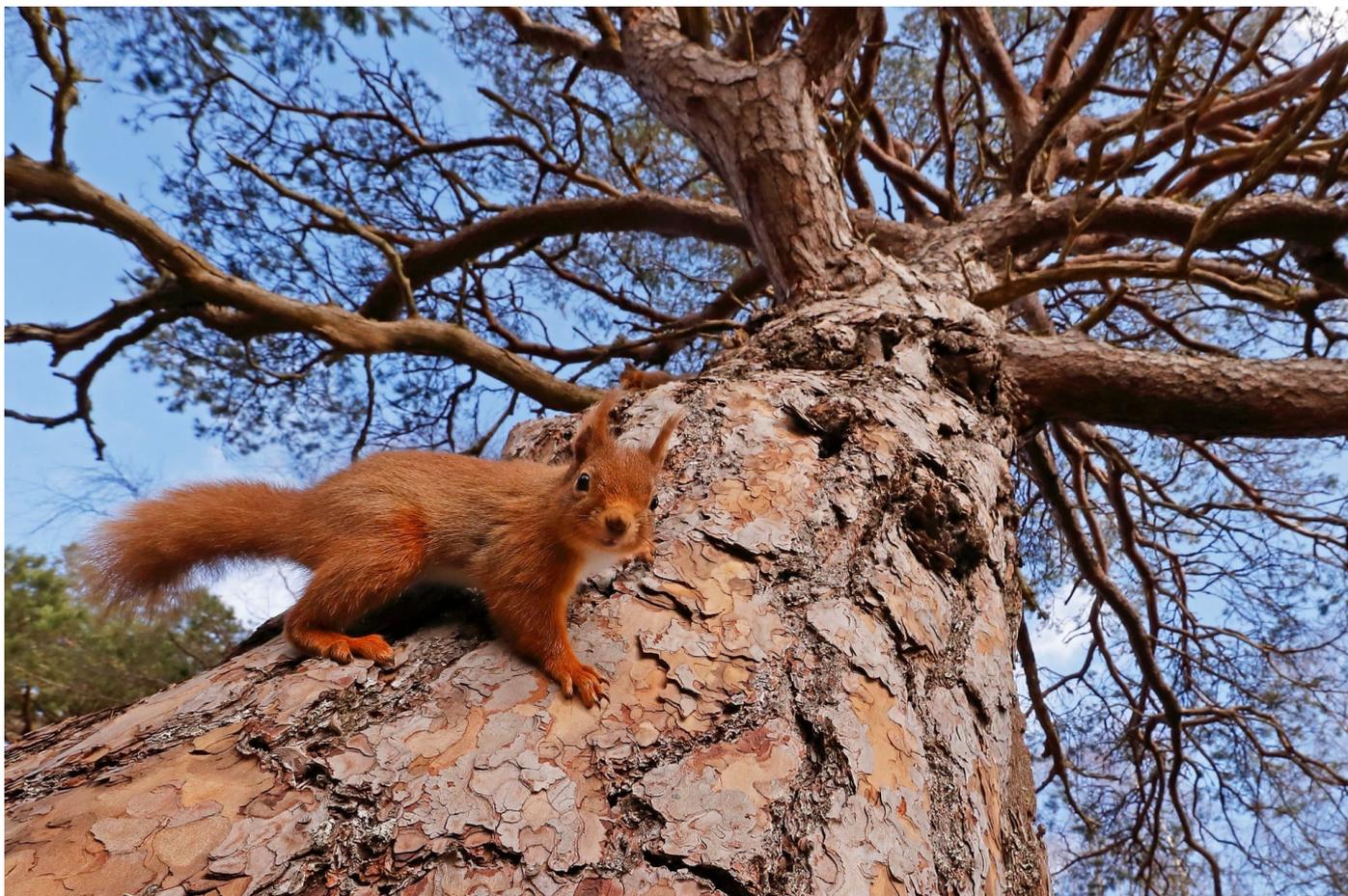
We continue to make great strides in recruiting landowners. The YMCA at Lakeside agreed to manage their estate for red squirrels and use the opportunity to educate their clients about the importance of red squirrels in the Lake District landscape. Here and elsewhere in the area, our trappers were active, with a number of greys removed while seeing encouraging evidence of reds. Here's one spotted at Grizedale by sharp-eyed Jamie Green in early 2018.



Coniston & Torver

The Coniston and Torver group have been getting traps out and about. Local people tell us where trapping is going on, one reporting the cull of around 35 greys this year. A red sighting was also reported, which is encouraging. Residents' donations enabled us to buy ten new traps, while we've also benefitted from the generosity of two

local charities. The Rawdon-Smith Trust owns the lake bed and some of the shoreline of Coniston Water and has given £2,000 for squirrel monitoring equipment. The Coniston 14, Coniston's largest community fund-raising event, has also made a donation of £300 to support our work. Thank you to them all!



Arnside & Silverdale

The winter months generally see a slowdown in trapping activity as the greys find plenty of natural food and have little incentive to explore feeders and traps. But we found that on this area's many caravan sites the greys are so used to easy pickings from caravan owners' bird feeders that they continue to turn up for a free meal. Discreet trapping around some sites proved effective and reduced

breeding populations that often seem to 'fatten themselves up' over winter. Our volunteers were busy building high capacity feeders that are effective in drawing in the greys. In March we were delighted to join Wildlife Oasis at Hale, when Tim Farron MP opened their new enlarged red squirrel enclosure. This family-friendly centre on the A6 provides a great introduction to wildlife for the next generation of conservationists and this

new facility offers a 'Grand Design' home for their reds. Wildlife Oasis is one of our corporate members.

With more landowners, caravan site operators and residents supporting grey control we're increasingly confident that red squirrels will return in numbers to their natural home. Encouraging sightings at Beetham and Slackhead align with our working hypothesis that, when we create space, the reds will expand from existing red squirrel areas nearby.

Financial support and help in kind from supporters remains crucial to long term success. The logo of Holgate's Caravan Parks, our major sponsor, is a red squirrel. The company has now 'recruited' Mawson, a beautifully carved two metre tall wooden red squirrel, after Michael Holgate stepped in with the highest bid at a charity auction.

Mawson sits proudly at the gateway to the company's flagship site in Silverdale as an ambassador to raise awareness about how people can help Cumbria's native red squirrels.



Looking forward

2019 will be a year when we must re-double our efforts to encourage people to report red squirrel sightings and sustain grey squirrel control.

More and more people now recognise that, with landowners' commitment and continued support from local communities, maintaining a strong and healthy red squirrel population in Cumbria is not a lost cause. Shows, talks and social media remain a major part of the service we offer in spreading the word. National projects such as Red Squirrels United and Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels also provide valuable lessons that we might adopt in getting that message out.

In the next few years we shall learn much more about non-lethal grey squirrel control methods and their place in the conservation of our native reds. Pine martens seem to be slowly recolonising north Cumbria and re-introductions are being talked about. Research into grey squirrel fertility control, now moving towards field trials, also offers hope.

Some of our sources of funding will come to an end in 2019- the much-appreciated Heritage Lottery funding for our work in the Rusland Valley, for example. To bridge the gap we will work ever more closely with woodland owners and others in the supply chain, who appreciate our work in reducing the damage that grey squirrels cause to timber crops, young trees and our songbirds.

Caravan site operators and others in the tourism industry increasingly recognise the value that red squirrels bring to their offer. We hope to build our growing number of corporate supporters and sponsors and publicise their role in promoting Cumbria as *the* place in England to see red squirrels.



Westmorland Red Squirrels

Our thanks to **Cumbria Wildlife Trust** for printing this Annual Review and to **Neil McIntyre** for the use of his images:

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