



Westmorland Red Squirrels



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## Annual Review 2020



There's little doubt that 2020 was a challenging year, yet Westmorland Red Squirrels did remarkably well to keep going with its practical conservation work to protect our red squirrels. Thank you to everyone who

pulled out the stops and simply got on with it, regardless of the obstacles that had to be overcome to comply with government guidance. We revised our risk assessments, briefed our contracted and voluntary red squirrel rangers and liaised closely with landowners to ensure Covid-19 compliance. We are very grateful for everyone's fantastic efforts under difficult circumstances.

Our income fell in 2020, which was understandable considering the lack of visitors during lockdown and the

cancellation of so many local shows and events. Thank you therefore to those who made generous donations, and to those who managed to raise funds for us, both helping to alleviate the shortfall.

Happily, red squirrel sightings continue across our area, offering justified cause for optimism that our efforts are worthwhile. We hope for a return to more normal times soon, and wish you a better 2021.

**Geoff Hetherington, Chairman**

*Making the future safe for our red squirrels*

# 2020 in a nutshell

## Squirrels

**436**

reds reported



**7244**

greys caught



## Events, meetings and publicity



344 WRS E-News subscribers



789 followers on Twitter



## 10 meetings:

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

1 external meeting  
- our Hawkshead public meeting on 26th February

3 Zoom meetings and webinars

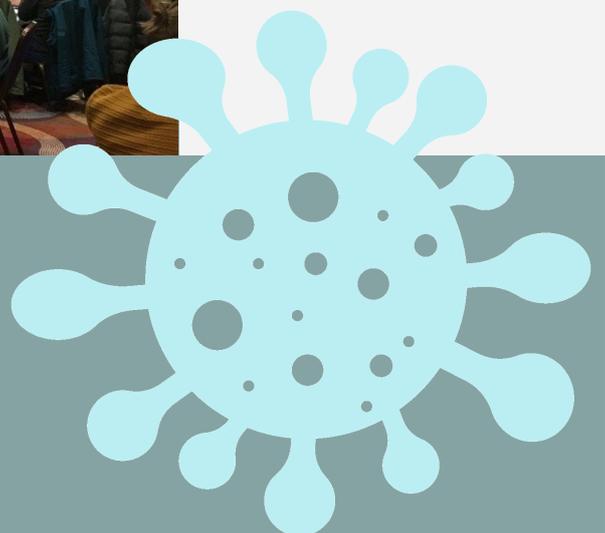
1 conference  
Red Squirrels United's final Knowledge Fair in Newcastle

2 media interviews  
with BBC Radio Cumbria and That's Cumbria TV

## CORONAVIRUS dominated in 2020

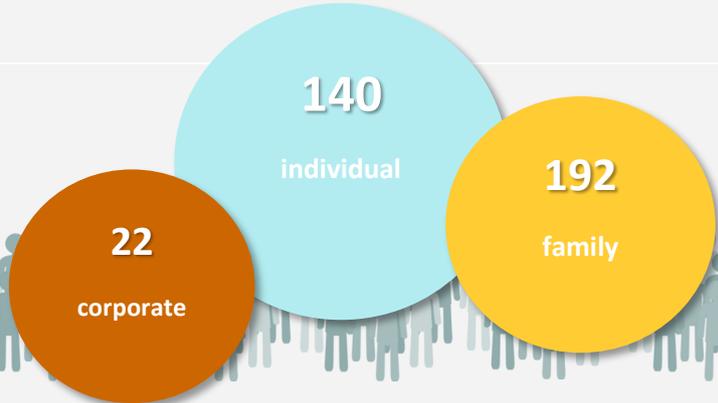
1 talk given to a community group

All local shows cancelled



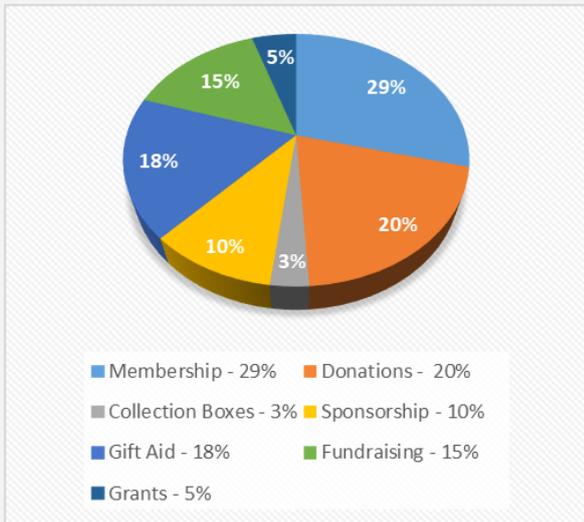
**Members** at the end of 2020

**354** members

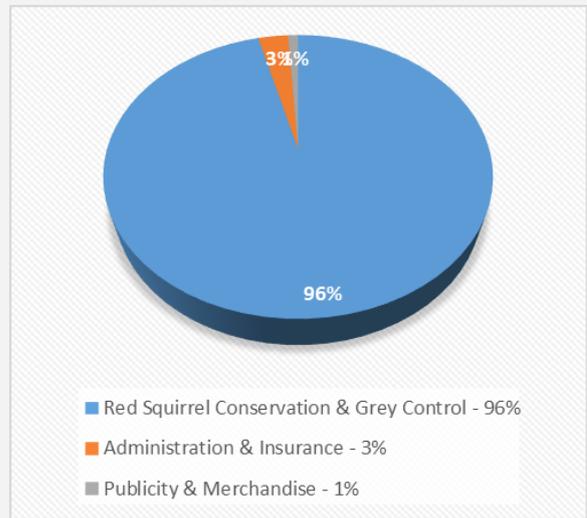


**Financials** for the 2020 calendar year.

**Income**



**Expenditure**

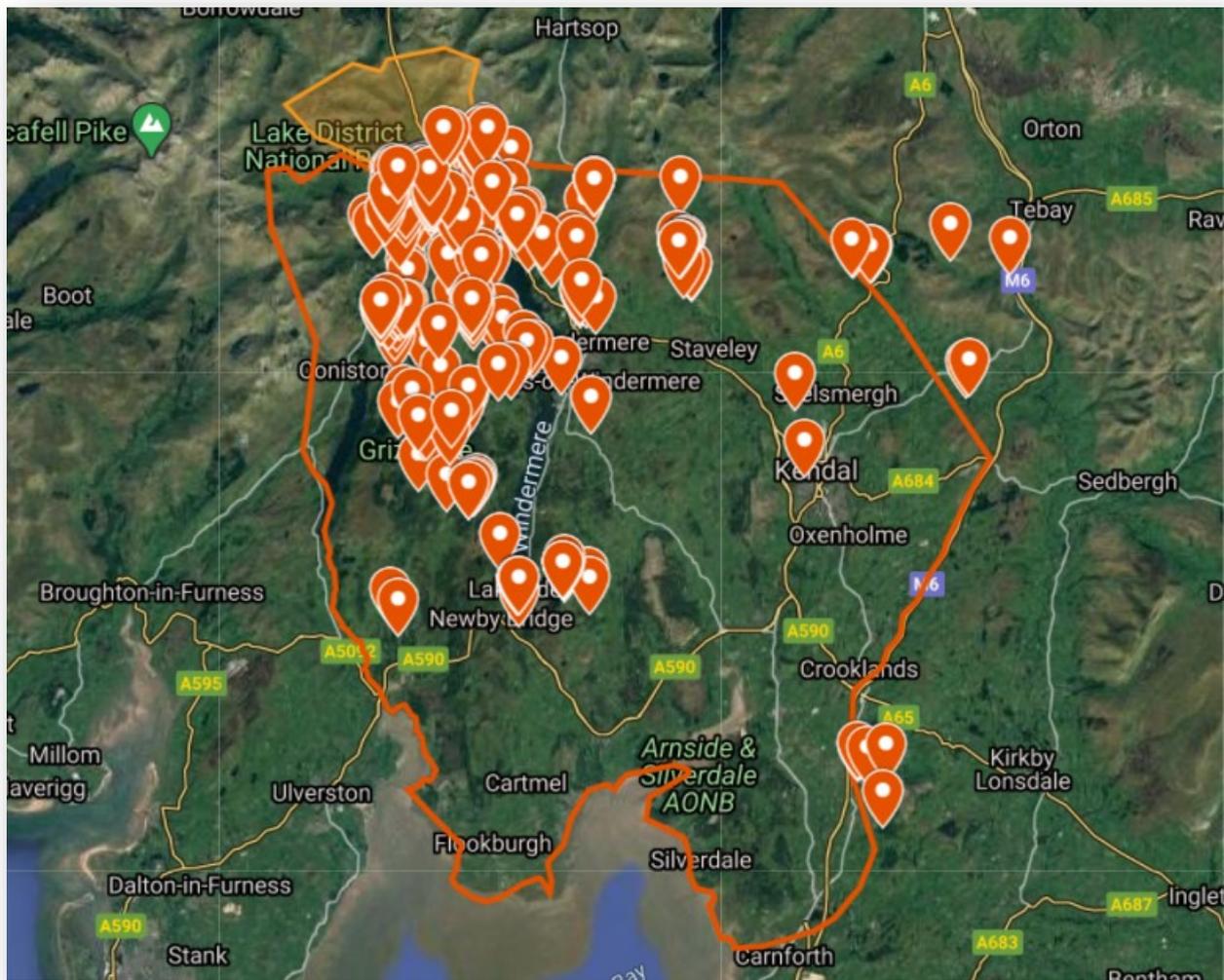


Our most recently published accounts for the financial year 2019/20 show income as £41,377 and expenditure as £35,319

**Some 2020 reds**



## Red Sightings in 2020



### Thomas Peter Naylor DL, FCA

With great sadness, we record that our President, Peter Naylor, passed away during 2020. Elected at our AGM in 2016 as the first President of Westmorland Red Squirrels, Peter was an active supporter of red squirrel conservation for many, many years. He took great pleasure in ensuring that his Bryerswood Estate woodlands at Far Sawrey provided a safe haven for our precious red squirrels.

Peter got involved in the campaign to save the red squirrel in the late 1990's, leading the establishment of the Furness Red Squirrel Group, and remained passionate for the cause until his death. A keen countryman and sportsman, he was also very interested in forestry. He managed the 350 acres of woodland owned by his wife Paddy in Far and Near Sawrey from 1979 until 2001. His interest in woodlands and forestry had first alerted him to the damage that the invasive grey squirrel was causing. That, and his desire to see the beautiful native red squirrel survive in the Lake District, were the drivers of his enthusiasm.

### AGM

For the first time, due to Covid-19, our AGM was a virtual affair this year. Normally held in May, we initially postponed in the hope of holding it later in the year. When it became clear that restrictions would affect attendance, we decided to conduct the business by email and post. Our trustees and office holders were re-elected en bloc with the exception of Ian Hackett, who decided to step down after many years as a valued trustee. Ian intends to continue working on our show stand – when the shows resume.



## Ambleside and Langdale

It's been a patchy year. Fewer greys were around but they proved harder to trap. Fortunately, we were able to recruit more volunteer trappers, which should help reduce the impact on reds in future. Rothay Park seems to be becoming a haven for grey squirrels, but South Lakeland District Council does not permit grey control due to heavy public use. In contrast, the University of Cumbria allowed us to control greys on its Ambleside campus, for which we are grateful. Happily, more reds were spotted across the area, which is always heartening, with apparently strong populations around Ambleside, Skelwith and Langdale.

## Troutbeck

More greys were in evidence in the valley, possibly because less visitor traffic has reduced road kills. Red squirrels continue to hold on in the valley, but we can't be complacent.

Fortunately, many local people are actively supporting grey squirrel control. Indeed, some of the more isolated residents appeared to relish the arrival of our volunteers as someone to talk to! Despite everything, the Troutbeck plant stall kept going, becoming one of the social hubs of the village. The stall, alongside our successful reindeer sales, raised almost £2000 in the year. A special thank you to Jayne and Garnett for their efforts!



## Windermere

Since 2017, we have attracted and nurtured a colony of reds in St Catherine's Wood. Our volunteers work hard to protect them by

shooting the greys in the winter and trapping in Spring onwards. As well as trapping at hotels and in woods, we have a list of households willing to have traps in their gardens. This has proved successful. The effect on bird life has been noticeable: sit in any wood for a while and you will be surprised as the tree creepers, nuthatches, tits and woodpeckers go about their business undisturbed by greys preying on their nests, fledglings and food.

A surprise was the increase in hedgehogs caught in our live traps. Released unharmed, they shuffle off quite happily.

## Coniston and Torver

We have fluctuated between extremely quiet and extremely busy with visitors. Ping-ponging between lockdown and no lockdown, volunteers have been cautious, with some shielding, but reports of greys have not been significant. A volunteer at the western end of Torver reported seeing only an occasional grey in their garden so trapping over the last two years has made a considerable difference. We hope reds may move along the old railway line from Broughton-in-Furness.

We have missed our two local shows, Coniston Country Fair and Torver Country Fair. Both stalls normally attract a lot of interest among local people and visitors alike.

## Central Area

We continue to make space for red squirrel recovery, from Levens Hall in the south to Longsleddale and Kentmere in the north. Sightings near Brigsteer and Sizergh and in our northern valleys were encouraging, though sadly one was a roadkill.

After the first lockdown, trapping resumed in Kendal, and June and July proved productive, with more caught in September. Thanks to residents' support, we removed more than 80 greys from gardens. Unfortunately, unauthorised trap removal or closures

undermined our efforts in some public spaces and cemeteries. This threatens our ability to restore our native reds. We continue to seek more volunteers to host traps. And squirrel sightings are always welcome.

## Witherslack and Grange-over-Sands

Our efforts were hit hard this year. Much of our work usually takes place in Forestry England woodlands, where permission was withdrawn during the lockdown periods. Grey control in Grange-over-Sands normally focusses on the woodlands above the town but their popularity as a venue for local exercise proved problematic for discreet trapping. Happily, we received consistent reports of robust red populations at Cartmel Fell and near Staveley in Cartmel.

## Arnside and Silverdale

Our focus has been on clearing greys from the Arnside peninsula in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). We hope to see natural recolonisation by reds, but are actively contemplating reintroductions to accelerate the process, possibly in 2022. We removed approximately 900 greys in 2020. Covid-19 has been a cloud with a silver lining, with more time available from our dedicated band of volunteers. Not all trap: many filled feeders to attract greys for trapping, others put out and checked hair tubes for squirrel presence, with nine transects across the peninsula. The University of Cumbria independently monitored the transects to assess the absence of greys – a prerequisite for safe re-introduction of reds.

Encouragingly, thanks to sustained grey control, a breeding population of red squirrels is known to inhabit woodlands near Burton in Kendal, 1.5 miles east of the AONB. We actively support a group of volunteers there, to encourage population expansion.

## UK Squirrel Accord

The UK Squirrel Accord is a UK-wide partnership of 39 leading conservation and forestry organisations, Government agencies and companies, with links to voluntary red squirrel conservation groups. For three years, until March 2020, our Deputy Chair, Bob Cartwright, represented the interests and views of volunteer red squirrel groups across the UK as a member of the Accord's Executive Committee,

Accord signatories work collaboratively to preserve the UK's wooded landscapes and associated biodiversity to secure and expand UK red squirrel populations and ensure UK woodlands flourish and deliver multiple benefits for future generations.

The Accord has commissioned research into fertility control for grey squirrels, offering a non-lethal way to control population densities and support eradication. The study aims to produce an immunocontraceptive, ingested orally by grey squirrels using a species-specific delivery mechanism. The research is in Year 3 of the five-year project. We hope that this innovative work will provide an effective, less labour intensive, method of control.

Complementing this work, the Animal and Plant Health Agency are developing a model to compare management methods. Details of all the research and more information about the Accord are available on its website: [www.squirrelaccord.uk](http://www.squirrelaccord.uk)

Elsewhere, researchers at the Roslin Institute in Edinburgh are exploring the potential for gene drive technology to control grey squirrels.



## Rusland

We continue to build on the legacy created by the Rusland Horizons Scheme, which was largely funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund between 2017 and 2019. Most red sightings were in the areas of known small populations: two or three areas of Grizedale, on the edge of the Graythwaite Estate, in Graythwaite's woodland and around Colton. 13 sightings were reported, surprisingly similar to the 14 reported in 2019. 501 greys were dispatched: 72 by contractors, 308 by the Graythwaite Estate and 121 by volunteers – a magnificent effort which is clearly paying dividends in sustaining red squirrel viability.

We continue to believe that red sightings and grey cull numbers are under-reported and we encourage the reporting of sightings through Grizedale Visitor Centre and the Graythwaite Estate shop. A number of local people are known to trap and shoot greys, but do not always report what they are doing.

Once again, we were grateful for financial support from Graythwaite Estate, the John Strutt Conservation Foundation, Logs Direct, the Lake District National Park Authority and Forestry England.

## South Cumbria Squirrel Management Forum

An important part of our work involves liaison with neighbouring volunteer red squirrel groups, landowners and other agencies to adopt a joined-up approach to protecting our red squirrels. One way we do that is by convening twice-yearly meetings of the South Cumbria Squirrel Management Forum, though in 2020 we were restricted to a single Zoom meeting.

Nonetheless, the Forum connects us with the Grasmere and South Lakes

## Hawkshead

Our packed public meeting at Hawkshead in February demonstrated tremendous local support for community action to protect red squirrels. The meeting generated several volunteer recruits to help with monitoring and control. We are also grateful for financial support from Lakeland Hideaways, a holiday cottage business based in the village.



## John Nettleton MBE

John, our oldest trapper, died on Christmas Eve, aged 92. A keen supporter to the end, John would report grey squirrel sightings on his walks in the local woods and would email at 6.30 am each time he caught a squirrel in the garden of his apartment. John was an athlete and fell runner and was still running Park Runs at Fellfoot at 91! He was a lovely man and an inspiration to all.

red squirrel groups, private and public landowners, and public and charity sector partners. By sharing expertise, we can identify resource requirements, priorities for action and pursue potential funding sources.

We are grateful for the engagement of Forestry England, National Trust, Lake District National Park Authority, Red Squirrels Northern England, Cumbria Wildlife Trust, Graythwaite Estate, Rusland Horizons Trust, Colton Parish Council and the University of Cumbria.



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## Fundraising

Opportunities to raise funds to support our work in protecting red squirrels and promoting public awareness took a major hit this year as all shows and talks were cancelled. Corporate sponsorship, another of our important revenue streams, was also affected as some tourism-based sponsors were forced to limit expenditure in the interests of their own viability.

Thankfully, many have continued their support. Welcome online income came from Wendy's Fuzzytuft squirrel patterns and from a special appeal to our members in these difficult times.



**fuzzytuft**  
knitting patterns



## Red Squirrels United

Red Squirrels United ran from 2016-2020, conserving red squirrel populations in nine areas across northern England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Funded by EU LIFE and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, this £3,000,000 project connected several red squirrel initiatives delivering a programme of red squirrel conservation and knowledge sharing. The project's history and legacy can be found at [www.redsquirrelsunited.org.uk](http://www.redsquirrelsunited.org.uk).

An independent evaluation found it generated £11.5 million of benefits for red squirrel conservation based on social, ecological and environmental factors. Some of our members and trustees attended the final Knowledge Fair in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in March.



Listening to the Northumberland Pipes at the Knowledge Fair

## Jeff Scovell

Jeff Scovell has been a prolific and dedicated volunteer and contract trapper over the years for Westmorland Red Squirrels. This year, he decided to step down from that role, and we take this opportunity to thank Jeff for all his work. He put a lot of thought into his conservation methods, and was always willing to share his ideas.

Jeff's most recent 'patch' ranged widely between Sizergh, where he worked closely with National Trust rangers, and Kentmere and Longsleddale. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Jeff's commitment over many years has made a massive contribution to the survival of red squirrels in south Lakeland.



Jeff Scovell setting a wildlife camera

## Grasmere to Grizedale (G2G) Project

The G2G's purpose is to remove grey squirrels between Grasmere and Grizedale Forest to further protect red squirrel populations around Langdale, Grasmere and Ambleside. Funded primarily by the National Trust through the Countryside Stewardship scheme, thanks are also due for financial support from Forestry England, Red Squirrels Northern England (RSNE) and the Grasmere Red Squirrel Group. Westmorland Red Squirrels contributed £2500 this year and work focussed around Tarn Hows, Claife, Grasmere, Rydal and Coniston. Thanks go to Jack Edmondson, the RSNE red squirrel ranger, assisted by his colleague, Matt Stuart, and several landowners and volunteers. Almost 1,500 greys were removed (a 50 per cent increase on 2019) and nearly 600 red squirrels were reported having been seen across the project area compared with 135 in 2019.

## E News

We paused the issue of our two-monthly E News at the beginning of the year. We wanted to test readers' views on content, consider new ways of generating material and review frequency of publication. A survey of our members revealed great enthusiasm for receiving regular updates on our activities, but not necessarily quite so often! We will therefore resume production in 2021, with issues distributed quarterly.

To receive your copy of E News you can subscribe at [www.westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk/news](http://www.westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk/news)



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## Westmorland Red Squirrels

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

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or by email to: [sightings@westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk](mailto:sightings@westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk)  
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