

Grasmere to Grizedale (G2G)



Red Squirrel Project Summary

Project background and overview

Red squirrels are engrained in the culture and natural heritage of the Lake District, immortalized through Beatrix Potter and Squirrel Nutkin. This charming, engaging but seriously threatened British mammal still delights thousands of visitors to the area each year, and is cherished by local communities engaged and involved in conservation activities to protect them. A recent survey revealed that red squirrels were found in over 60% of survey sites in the Lake District National Park, making the area unequivocally one of the best places to see red squirrels in the UK.

Without ongoing conservation intervention, red squirrels could still disappear from this landscape. The ***Grasmere to Grizedale (G2G) Red Squirrel Project*** will deliver a programme of collaborative action to protect reds, working in partnership with local NGOs, volunteer red squirrel groups and public and private landowners. Through this new initiative, red squirrels will be given breathing space through the removal of a non-native competitor, the grey squirrel. The result will be increased opportunities for local communities and visitors to the region to experience the joy of seeing reds in the wild.

The project will build on historic effort by a multitude of organisations, will expand its remit to include new collaborations and working partnerships, and will encourage local people to take up the baton, equipping them with new skills to enable them to participate in efforts to conserve this charismatic and endangered species.

Key project aim

The key aim is to restore the predominance of the native red squirrel by reducing competition and disease risk posed by grey squirrels within the G2G project area. The project will result in far fewer greys entering the red squirrel stronghold of Grasmere, enabling red squirrels in this area to thrive. It will also allow reds to recolonise woodlands where they are currently either absent or present in very low numbers, effectively moving the red line further south, increasing red squirrel range within the Lake District National Park.

Project location

A map showing the project area is provided at the end of this document. Geographically, the area is bordered by Dunmail Raise to the north, Lake Windermere to the east, and the Furness Fells in the west. To the south, the G2G project will join up with an existing initiative, where the National

Lottery Heritage-funded 'Rusland's Reds' project continues to work with communities to protect reds in the woodlands and valley to the south.

Outcomes

The main focus will be practical action on the ground. This will include the following: 1) targeted grey squirrel management 2) a standardised red and grey squirrel monitoring programme 3) data collection, analysis and dissemination. This action will be delivered by a combination of staff, contractors and volunteers who will work in close collaboration to ensure maximum coverage and effect. In addition, a campaign to raise the profile of the project will be delivered, helping to inspire longer-term support from local communities, landowners and businesses.

Key outcomes as a result of the project will be:

- Red squirrel-strong areas in the north are better protected, allowing the species to thrive due to reduced competition with greys
- Red squirrels are given opportunities to recolonise woodlands to the south of the area as a result of grey squirrel management
- We better understand the geographical spread of red squirrels through solid and regular monitoring and data collection
- An increased volunteer workforce, equipped with new practical skills (monitoring or grey management) are actively engaged in the project, with increased health and well-being benefits linked to working outdoors
- Local communities, businesses and visitors benefit from more regular, first-hand experiences of red squirrels
- Partnerships are nurtured and strengthened through collective responsibility for reds across the area, making the work more sustainable.

Partnerships & manpower

A project steering group will oversee the direct management of the project, consisting of members of Westmorland Red Squirrels, Grasmere Red Squirrel Group and Red Squirrels Northern England. There will be wider consultation with other partners from the South Cumbria Squirrel Management Forum, including National Trust, Lake District National Park Authority, Forestry England, and local private landowners and managers.

The partnership will work closely together to ensure that the project is properly resourced, with buy-in from local communities, and that the aims and resulting outcomes are well communicated.

Practical delivery will be led by a network of paid rangers, contractors and volunteers, working closely to ensure the project aims are met, with tangible benefits to red squirrels, local communities and visitors to the area.

Funding

Funding for the project is already committed by a number of partners, including National Trust, Westmorland Red Squirrels, Grasmere Red Squirrel Group and Red Squirrels Northern England. Over time, as the project gathers momentum, the aim is to increase capacity by securing more funding, allowing for more resources to be spent on practical action to protect reds. Other partner organisations within the South Lakes Squirrel Management Forum will be encouraged to contribute, and there will be a campaign to encourage local businesses to invest in the project to ensure that outcomes are achieved, and sustainable.

Appendix: Grasmere to Grizedale Red Squirrel Project map showing target areas

