



## **SOCIETY REPORT TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2018**

On behalf of the trustees of Westmorland Red Squirrels, welcome to our Annual General Meeting for 2018. This has been an exciting year for us with progress in many areas, not least, of course, in protecting our wonderful red squirrels. More of that in a minute.

It has also been challenging at times, partly because Geoff, our Chairman, has been unable to play an active role for much of the year. We've missed his wisdom and experience and hope to have him back in harness very shortly. Meanwhile, the trustees have all stepped up and we hope you have not felt short changed when we've been stretched. This report, therefore, is mine on the Society's behalf, rather than the Chairman's.

If you're a member, you will know that our first charitable objective is to conserve red squirrels in south east Cumbria. We only do that thanks to the efforts and enthusiasm of our members, volunteers and contractors, and by working closely with landowners and other organisations who share our passion for looking after the reds.

After the explosion in grey numbers in 2015, the last two years have been characterised by people seeing far fewer greys in the early part of the year. But the greys do eventually appear and our cull figures remain significant, particularly as our capacity has increased. In 2017 we recorded 3940 grey culls compared with 3267 the year before, but far fewer than the 5140 in 2015.

Thankfully, the reds' range in 2017 remained comparable with previous years and we almost doubled the number of red sightings reported: 457 compared with 245 in 2016. That is hugely encouraging and testament not only to the public's vigilance but also their awareness that reporting these sightings is essential.

Our second charitable objective is to educate and inform the public about red squirrels and the need to conserve them. We put across our messages in many ways:

- We had stands at 16 local shows and events in 2017 and gave 13 talks. Our talks seem to be increasingly popular and we already have bookings for 2019.

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- Our website continues to include lots of information on squirrels and what we do.
- Our Facebook page has over 1200 'followers'. And our Twitter account has almost doubled its reach in the last year and now has more than 500 followers.
- We continue to encourage the support of landowners and make contact with organisations which can help us with our work and get our message across to a wider audience. We have a permanent display at the Lake District Visitor Centre at Brockhole; another at Wildlife Oasis near Beetham at their new red squirrel enclosure; and one at Grizedale Visitor Centre, where we now have support from the Forestry Commission for a more extensive display and programme of visitor engagement.
- We have our two-monthly E-News and an Annual Review.

In 2013 we had 160 voting members. By the end of last year we had more than doubled that to 322, and we had 18 corporate members and 4 corporate sponsors.

Looking at our areas more closely, I thank those involved for their work around Ambleside and Langdale. Thanks also to the Red Squirrels Northern England Ranger who we contracted thanks to a grant from the National Park.

In Kentmere, Longsleddale and Troutbeck and the areas south of these valleys, local residents continue to take charge of grey control, with support from contractors and our volunteers. I would once again like to say a special thank you to our area coordinator for their terrific work in the Troutbeck area.

Our efforts around Crook, Underbarrow, Crosthwaite and Brigsteer continue and grey numbers are down significantly: a problem of success! Our contractor continues to do excellent work around Sizergh and the National Trust-owned Brigsteer Woods although it is disappointing that we had no red sightings there last year. Thank you to the National Trust Ranger, for his support and help with control. The cooperation of the Levens Hall Estate, and the Forestry Commission has meant we continue to reduce greys in Barrowfield, a previous grey haven.

Cull reports from the Windermere area are heartening, and I pay tribute to our area coordinators and local volunteers for their control work. Gaining Town Council support for shooting as well as trapping brought some publicity to our work in the area and the extent of local support was heartening.

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In the Witherslack & Grange area, we still have stable red populations around Witherslack, Ulpha and as far as Foulshaw. Our contractors continue to work hard and trap in woods owned by the National Park, South Lakeland District Council, Woodland Trust and Forestry Commission, as well as in many private woodlands.

Further west, in the Grizedale and Rusland areas, the South Cumbria Squirrel Management Forum brings all the main players and landowners together twice a year. The Forestry Commission again made some funds available through Red Squirrels Northern England for grey control in the area north of Grizedale. Our leadership of the three-year Heritage Lottery funded Rusland's Reds project is gradually securing grey control across the area and producing an encouraging number of red sightings. Our local steering group is doing a fantastic job.

Kendal and neighbouring areas to the south and east remain in need of greater attention. Our coordinator does great work in the town and South Lakeland District Council has thanked us for our control of greys in its parks and cemeteries, which we do under licence. But there are still too many greys and we still need to recruit more trappers: last year we had to re-deploy one of our contractors, which added to the cost.

In the Arnside and Silverdale area our enthusiastic local sub-group coordinates training for trappers, controls greys and raises community awareness. Thanks to the area coordinator, our local steering group. And to the Dallam Estate, which is doing a magnificent job in clearing greys from its woodlands. Thanks also go to Holgate's Caravan Parks, the Barnes Charitable Trust, and the Landscape Trust for their financial support. Without it, we wouldn't have been able to recruit contractors to augment volunteers' efforts.

Finally, thanks to our coordinator in the Coniston and Torver area. There was great interest when we held a public meeting in Coniston and we are receiving grey sightings and many traps have been deployed. We have signed a further licence with the National Park Authority to operate in their woodlands at Torver and Coniston and they have asked me to pass on their thanks for our work in all of their woodlands.

In the wider world of squirrels, a feature of our work again this year has been our liaison with key agencies and our influence on policy and practice. We continue to benefit from our association with Red Squirrels Northern England and really appreciate their support in sourcing traps and in exploring

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opportunities to have our shooters' skills externally validated. We play an active role in Northern Red Squirrels, the umbrella association for volunteer red squirrel groups in the north of England. Thank you also to Cumbria Wildlife Trust for all the help they offer, including printing our Annual Review. I also pay tribute to Peter Bullard, who is shortly to retire as CWT's Director, and has been a good friend.

Our Secretary continues in his role as a co-opted member of the UK Squirrel Accord's Executive Committee and some of us attended its autumn meeting at the Animal and Plant Health Agency's HQ near York to hear about research into a grey squirrel fertility control vaccine. Also emerging evidence of tree diseases that appear to be triggered or spread by grey squirrels. These relationships enable us to offer a volunteers' perspective and provide an invaluable opportunity to understand and influence thinking at national level.

Finally, I would like to thank each of the trustees, who do so much behind the scenes to run our charity: Geoff, of course as our Chair; Dave Marshall, who coordinates our Grange and Witherslack area; James Blacow who manages the collection boxes as well as coordinating activity in Kendal; Ian McIvor as Treasurer, coordinator of events and much more; Ian Hackett who coordinates our work around Crosthwaite and Brigsteer and is a regular at events; and Gail Armstrong, who brings much valued experience on mammals as well as local knowledge.

And while Steph McIvor is no longer a trustee she continues to work away behind the scenes collecting and collating our records, publishing our E-News and Annual Review and in so many other ways.

Also thank you to Kath Edwards who stepped down as a trustee mid-year due to other time pressures, but helped with membership admin and with much else to do with the events we attend.

Above all I want to pay tribute and thank all volunteers who actively give up their time to help us – at least 50 of you when we add it all up - this work is absolutely vital if our red squirrels are to stand a chance.

**Thank you!**

**Bob Cartwright**  
**Secretary**  
**24 May 2018**