

## Autumn Newsletter

### RSST funding new study for RSTW on genetic diversity



-David Bailey Photography

Red Squirrel Survival Trust is pleased to support a study to increase understanding of the extent and rate of genetic change in isolated red squirrel populations, to inform future red squirrel management and calibrate genetic reinforcement policy for the UK, complementing the work of the UK Squirrel Accord.

In Wales, England and Northern Ireland red squirrel populations often contain small numbers of animals and these can be isolated because of habitat fragmentation or the presence of large established grey squirrel populations in the surrounding landscape. On islands such as Anglesey, Brownsea or the Isle of Wight, larger red squirrel populations are isolated by geography.

The numbers of individual red squirrels present in an isolated area will fluctuate in relation to the annual availability of food and changes in woodland habitat. In addition, if grey squirrels are nearby, then outbreaks of Squirrelpox virus can occur and these greatly reduce red squirrel abundance very dramatically in only a few weeks. Repeated population declines can lead to loss of genetic diversity and inbreeding. In the absence of dispersal between populations it is not possible for new bloodlines to boost populations suffering from low genetic diversity.

### The Prince’s Countryside Parade

This summer, RSST was delighted to come together with other rural charities to celebrate HRH The Prince of Wales’s 70th Birthday

The Royal Cornwall Show played host to a special celebration of HRH The Prince of Wales’s contribution to the countryside, environment and rural communities in the UK. In total, more than 60 patronages came together in a unique and colourful parade highlighting their work and achievements to date.

The event promoted their collective understanding of the scope of countryside, environment and rural activity and provides a legacy to share best practice in the future. RSST was represented at the parade by Jackie Foott (of British Red Squirrel) and Zel, our part time red squirrel.



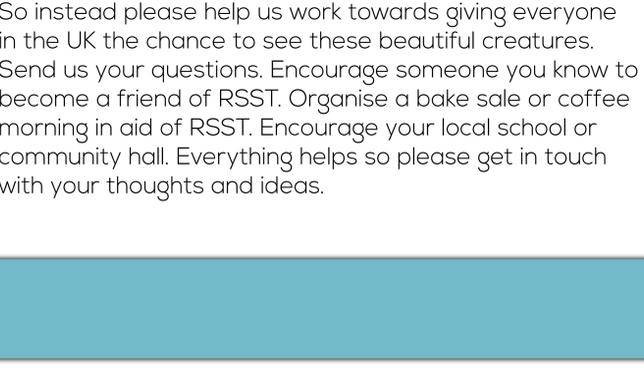
Chris Riddle, Secretary of the Royal Cornwall Show, “It is an immense honour and privilege to host such a significant national celebration of the countryside. I have been overwhelmed by the creativity of the patronages taking part and the distances many will travel to participate in the parade. The Royal Cornwall Show is at the heart of the rural community in Cornwall and it is a great pleasure to recognise the valuable work achieved by these charities here in the county and throughout the UK.”



Claire Saunders, Director of The Prince’s Countryside Fund said, “I am thrilled to be involved in organising this extraordinary event. It is the first time that so many of HRH The Prince of Wales’s rural charities have been brought together and will be a marvellous demonstration of countryside resilience and the collective impact of what can be achieved for future generations with a collaborative and united approach.”

The event showcased broad themes including wildlife and conservation, native breeds, food and farming, and heritage and skills. The breadth and diverse range of charities taking part in the parade provided an ideal opportunity to draw together and catalogue their collective achievements to date. HRH The Prince of Wales’s charities illustrate the complex and interconnected nature of the countryside and the features, which make it unique, and to be cherished for future generations.

The Prince’s Countryside Parade took place in the main arena on Thursday 7th June 2018 at the Royal Cornwall Show.



### Red Squirrel Awareness Week

Takes place this year from September 24th. Help us to encourage awareness by sending in your sightings, like the talented photographer and RSST supporter, Rosanna Forbes. This incredible shot was taken at Glendalmond, Perthshire on September 5th. Sadly we know that not everyone is lucky enough yet to have the opportunity to see red squirrels in their local environment. So instead please help us work towards giving everyone in the UK the chance to see these beautiful creatures. Send us your questions. Encourage someone you know to become a friend of RSST. Organise a bake sale or coffee morning in aid of RSST. Encourage your local school or community hall. Everything helps so please get in touch with your thoughts and ideas.

### North East towns at the forefront of efforts to save Scotland’s red squirrels

RSST partners, Saving Scotland’s Red Squirrels, are urging the public to be on the lookout as recent grey squirrel sightings have been reported in crucial areas for red squirrel conservation.

The project has received reports of recent grey squirrel activity around both Ellon and St Cyrus, prompting a call for locals to record sightings of both red and grey squirrels online.

The grey squirrel is an invasive species that was introduced to Britain from North America. They out-compete red squirrels for food and living space and some also carry squirrelpox, a virus that doesn’t harm grey squirrels but is deadly to reds.

Grey squirrels were first introduced to Aberdeen in the 1970s, rapidly spreading throughout the city and into surrounding Aberdeenshire, causing the region’s red squirrel populations to decline rapidly.

Years of grey squirrel control work carried out by Saving Scotland’s Red Squirrels has already removed grey squirrels from much of Aberdeenshire, allowing red squirrels to return to places such as Ellon and even some parts of Aberdeen. A 2017 survey conducted by the project indicated that red squirrel populations in the North East have increased, while remaining stable elsewhere in the country.

The reason for the recent increase in grey squirrel sightings in Aberdeenshire is unclear but may be due to young grey squirrels from this year’s breeding season spreading out to look for new habitat.

Dr Gwen Maggs, Saving Scotland’s Red Squirrels Conservation Officer for North East Scotland said:

“This is the first time grey squirrels have been reported in the Ellon area for a number of years, and there have also been two sightings of grey squirrels in the St Cyrus area in recent days.

St Cyrus, and the Mearns area as a whole, sits in a crucial gap between the grey squirrel population south of the Highland Line and the isolated pocket of grey squirrels in Aberdeen. Squirrelpox is not currently a threat in Aberdeenshire, however this could change if the gap between the two grey squirrel populations closes and they become able to breed.

“However, this is not the first time greys have been seen in these areas, and there is no cause to panic. Equally, complacency is not an option and we would like the public’s help to build a better picture of the local situation so that we can focus our work and ensure the grey squirrels are removed to protect the well-established red squirrel population in the region.”