



Red Squirrels - Woodland Management

As the alien grey squirrel continues to spread across the lowlands of Scotland, the Borders and up the river valleys leading into Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen, our native red squirrel is becoming more and more scarce in these areas. It is beginning to seem possible that red squirrels might one day be completely replaced by grey squirrels in Scotland.

Reds and Greys have different food and habitat requirements although these do overlap. Therefore the most effective way to conserve Red squirrels is to manage the habitat to their advantage and to the disadvantage of Greys.

Red Squirrels are found in a range of woodland habitats. However conifer woodlands are their prime habitat, with Scots Pine being the optimum. Greys do not thrive in conifer plantations as they cannot reach the higher cones to feed on the seeds. Instead they do best in broadleaved woodlands with trees such as Oak, Beech, Hazel and Sycamore that produce large seeds. In mixed woodlands, where conifer and large-seeded broadleaved trees are present the Grey will also out compete the Reds.

Native Scottish trees and shrubs that enhance woodland habitat and give Red Squirrels the competitive edge include the following coniferous and small-seeded broadleaved species: Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), Douglas Fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), Birch (Silver and Downy) (*Betula pendula/Betula pubescens*), Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), Willow (Goat and Crack), Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), Wild Cherry (*Prunus avium*), Wych Elm/Scots Elm (*Ulmus glabra*), Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), Dog Rose (*Rosa canina*) and Juniper. These are the species that should be planted to enhance the structural and age diversity of the woodland whilst keeping the Scots Pine as the predominant species.

Species less suitable to the red squirrel include natives such as Sessile Oak, Hazel, Beech and Sycamore as they produce large seeds that the greys find easy to digest compared to the reds. This in turn leads to better growth and survival of the Grey Squirrel and consequently better reproductive success than

the Red. In addition, Grey Squirrels can carry Squirrel Poxvirus (SQPV), which is deadly to Red Squirrels, and was reported in the Borders just a few years ago.

Ensuring that the woodlands have wide age diversity will ensure that the woodlands are sustainable. A programme of thinning and under planting with some of the tree / shrub species detailed above would be appropriate, and some small-seeded broadleaved trees and shrubs would enhance the woodland edge.

Consideration should be given to controlling large-seeded broadleaved regeneration throughout the woodlands. In particular Oak, Beech and Sycamore regeneration should be reduced to occasional feature trees rather than occurring frequently throughout the woodlands. Norway Spruce (not Sitka spruce, native to N. America not Scotland) and European Larch are useful feature trees through the woodlands as Red Squirrels love the seed. However, they are not native to Scotland and the Norway Spruce does not seed as reliably as Scots Pine. Scottish Golf advocates the use of Scottish native trees.

Red squirrel feeders have limited value and some designs have proven to be unsatisfactory. However, the Dundee Ranger Service have developed a red squirrel feeder and the design for which can be downloaded for free from: www.dundeered squirrels.co.uk/downloads.htm.

It is imperative that the club is aware of the legislation regarding tree felling and pruning. As a general rule you are normally required to get permission from the Forestry Commission Scotland to fell growing trees. This is normally given in the form of a felling license available through the Forestry Commission Scotland. For further information please refer to:

<http://scotland.forestry.gov.uk/supporting/grants-and-regulations/felling-licences>

Further guidance

SWT Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels - <http://scottishsquirrels.org.uk/> and <http://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/what-we-do/scotlands-red-squirrels/>

To report a sighting of a Red Squirrel - <http://scottishsquirrels.org.uk/squirrel-sightings/>