



Member of  
Northern Red Squirrels  
[www.northernredsquirrels.org.uk](http://www.northernredsquirrels.org.uk)

# Red Squirrel Watch!

Safeguarding Ponteland District's Red Squirrels For Future Generations  
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## SQUIRREL POX OUTBREAK HITS DARRAS HALL

The deadly squirrel pox virus (SQPV) has broken out in our population of red squirrels in Darras Hall. In October two red squirrels were found with symptoms and a post mortem has confirmed the disease.

This is devastating news for our area as the virus is highly contagious and could wipe our whole population within weeks. Although only two squirrels have been found with the disease it is difficult to establish how many more have perished as the disease is fatal within two weeks and usually only about 10% of those contracting the disease are actually seen.

Both those found with the disease were located within yards of each other off Burnside Close, close to the Darras Road and the Western Way junction. To date no further poorly reds have been seen and THE GOOD NEWS is that a healthy red was sighted in November on the Burnside Close area – LET'S KEEP OUR FINGERS CROSSED.

### WHAT IS SQUIRREL POX VIRUS (SQPV)

Squirrel Pox Virus (SQPV) is found in grey squirrels but causes them no harm. However, it is ALWAYS fatal in red squirrels, causing a terrible death. When Grey Squirrels influx into a red squirrel habitat they can transmit the virus to red squirrels. The virus is highly contagious in red squirrels and once a population of reds has been infected it spreads very quickly and can wipe out a population of reds within weeks.

#### Symptoms

First symptoms include lethargy and poor coordination, with swelling and lesions soon developing around the eyes, nose, mouth, ears, paws and genitals. The virus weakens and physically impairs the squirrel making it difficult to feed and vulnerable to predators. The lesions and open sores cause secondary infections. Death occurs within 2 weeks.



Red Squirrel with SQPV

### WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

- **PLEASE BE VERY VIGILANT.** If you have reds visiting your garden please keep a close eye on them and report any suspected changes to their behaviour or suspected symptoms to us immediately.
- **We need to know about the health of our populations of reds in the Ponteland District.** Please report ALL sightings of red squirrels to us (via our website, email or telephone). Let us know numbers, health, behaviour. Please also report absence (if you are no longer seeing reds).
- **Please also report any sightings of GREY SQUIRRELS.** We need to remove any influxing greys from the area as soon as possible.
- **DISINFECT YOUR SQUIRREL AND BIRD FEEDERS** (Use ciltrox or arklens). Mouldy feeders can cause enteritis-type diseases in reds as well as being a possible contact point for red-to-red squirrel pox virus transmission.
- **PLEASE DO NOT TAKE YOUR FEEDERS DOWN IF YOU SEE A GREY SQUIRREL** – feeders can be an excellent early warning signal to let us know when a grey has come into the area. It can also help us to catch the grey.

### ROAD KILL

Our red squirrels continue to be mown down on our roads. A total of 14 reds have been run-over in Darras Hall and Ponteland this year, mainly on the main roads through Darras Hall – Darras Road, Middle Drive, Western Way, Edge Hill and Runnymede Road. It is believed that this is because many drivers exceed the speed limit, some driving over 50mph. WE APPEAL TO YOU TO PLEASE drive at the speed limit around the Estate and keep your eyes open for reds on the verges or pavements. Unfortunately, red squirrels don't have any road sense, so it is up to us to watch out for them! If you see a red on the pavement or verge, please slow down as they may hop into the road without looking.

**PLEASE KEEP EYES PEELED FOR REDS CROSSING THE ROAD!**

# NEW SQUIRREL INITIATIVE LAUNCHED

RED SQUIRRELS NORTH ENGLAND (RSNE) is an exciting new project to help to ensure the continued survival of red squirrels in the North of England.

The five year project is backed by a partnership between the Red Squirrel Survival Trust Charity (whose patron is Prince Charles), Forestry Commission, Natural England and The Wildlife Trusts.

The RSNE project aims to unite all elements of red squirrel conservation in the north of England to provide a coordinated approach to saving northern England's red squirrels. The RSNE project will be based around the selected forest strongholds in northern England, and will also provide funding for grey squirrel monitoring and control

across the wider landscape. It aims to maintain and where possible increase the size of red squirrel populations through targeted and sustained control of grey squirrels. "We have a great opportunity here. This will be a really comprehensive partnership to deliver red squirrel conservation on a landscape scale," said RSNE interim project manager Dr Craig Shuttleworth.

This is very exciting news, particularly for Northern Red Squirrels, the umbrella organisation for voluntary red squirrel groups. NRS is looking forward to working alongside the RSNE partners to make this new united approach really make a tangible difference.

**WATCH THIS SPACE!**

## A BUSY AUTUMN FOR REDS



Autumn is a very busy time for many animals including our red squirrels. It is a time when nature has produced a whole host of natural food such as fruit, berries and nuts.

During the autumn months red squirrels are particularly busy gathering food to store for the winter. Red squirrels eat a range of food from fungi to fruit but tree seeds, such as hazelnuts, beech nuts and pine nuts are their most important food, providing them with the right amount of nutrients to allow them to survive.

Unlike many native mammals, red squirrels don't hibernate during the cold winter months. This is because they aren't able to store enough body fat to allow them to sleep through the winter. Instead they need to forage throughout the cold months, although they do cuddle up inside their dreys when it is particularly cold. Red squirrels will often make their store stores close to their dreys during the

winter so that it is easily accessible even on the snowiest days.

**Please remember to continue to fill your feeders during the winter months.**

**Rustic Feeders £3.50 (filled with hazelnuts £5).**

**Robust Feeders £8.50**

**Free local delivery or available at our Ponteland Farmers' Market Stall.**

**Call Sally on 07878 061880.**

## A Grey Time

This summer and autumn has seen our largest number of grey squirrels coming into our area. Unfortunately, red squirrels **WILL NOT SURVIVE** if greys are present – not only because greys carry the deadly squirrel pox virus, but also because they out complete the reds eating up to 8 times as much as reds. They also invade red squirrels dreys, cause the females to cease breeding and drive away the males. Grey Squirrels also destroy birds' nests, eating eggs and baby birds.

The first greys were seen in May and after several residents reported seeing greys in their gardens we were able to remove eight greys. Reports of reds returning to gardens allowed us to breathe a sigh of relief. However, this was short lived! Throughout the summer and into autumn the sightings of greys have continued – resulting in a total of 31 greys caught to date! It is little wonder that we have seen our first outbreak of Squirrel Pox Virus. Let's hope this virus has burned itself out and that our reds will continue to thrive. Red sightings are now being reported around the estate and at the time of writing we haven't had a grey sighting reported for a week!

**We would like to THANK all residents who have reported grey sightings and monitored traps helping us to keep our Ponteland Area RED.**

**PLEASE REPORT ALL RED AND GREY SQUIRREL SIGHTINGS TO PONTELAND RED SQUIRRELS YOU CAN USE THE FORM ON OUR WEBSITE, EMAIL US OR TELEPHONE. CONTACT DETAILS OVERLEAF.**