



# Nutkin ventured, Nutkin gained

A programme to reintroduce indigenous red squirrels to Anglesey has been a resounding success – thanks to Red Squirrel Trust Wales and Henllys, HPB's North Wales home.

Though it continues to thrive across Europe and into Asia, the near demise of the red squirrel in Britain and Ireland has been well documented. The larger eastern grey squirrel, a North American import, carries the squirrel pox virus – harmless to itself, but lethal to reds. The eastern grey's proliferation has thus been accompanied by a steep decline in the number of red squirrels. Fewer than 140,000 are thought to be left in the British Isles, of which about 85% are in Scotland.

500, however – a conservative estimate, and rising fast – have made their home in Anglesey, North Wales, thanks to a reintroduction programme carried out by Red Squirrels Trust Wales and HPB's home on the island.

Dr Craig Shuttleworth, a Scot by birth, lives in Anglesey – and happens to be a leading authority on red squirrels. As such he was the natural choice to manage the project, first conceived towards the end of the 1990s.

"It was a very exciting time," Craig recalls. "We were very much making it up as we went along. It was very important to capture the public's imagination from the start, which we did by setting up the Friends of the Anglesey Red Squirrels

which aimed to be an interface between the project and local people, facilitating volunteering and involvement on Anglesey. Membership steadily grew to over 300 with a modest annual subscription funding the production of education material and the red squirrel webcam [one of the most popular features at Henllys].

"Stage one involved eradicating the grey squirrel population – neither an easy task nor a pleasant one; after all it's hardly the greys' fault they turned up here in the first place. But our project would have stood no chance without the removal of the 'grey threat'."

The Trust then released six red squirrels, in two small enclosures. Craig, however, is keen to stress that the project's focus has always been about introducing, establishing and maintaining a viable red squirrel population, rather than just letting loose a few cute fluffy animals. "The aim was always to restore, not to showcase – this isn't a wildlife park," he avers.

The Anglesey project was a first in another way, too. The island's trees are predominantly broadleaf, favoured by grey squirrels over conifers (this is the reason the reds, which have

no preference, have made a comparative success of surviving in Scotland's predominantly pine forests). To successfully reintroduce red squirrels in an environment where 'the grey holds sway' counts as a significant achievement.

"The lessons learned from Anglesey are valuable to science throughout the UK and Europe," Craig says.

With the project successfully started, it would be wrong to say that Craig, or the Trust, took a back seat; he is, however, quick to credit Henllys's woodsman David Morrison for continuing to manage the programme on a day-to-day level. "Gratifyingly, 150 or so of our Anglesey reds have decided to stick around the HPB site, which must be testament to David's excellent husbandry. These are wild animals, true enough; but they are undeniably lovely to look at – and we've steadily made that easier by moving feeding boxes closer to where people are. I know for a fact that HPB's Bondholders love to see them, to watch them on the bird tables..."

"And, given how much help Henllys and HPB have been to us, it seems like the least we could do!" he adds.

## How you can help

- ▶ Report sightings - of red and grey squirrels – to the Trust using their sightings page.
- ▶ Feed red squirrels in your garden or local woodland using a red squirrel feeder, which can be obtained from the Trust.
- ▶ Report dead red squirrels to the project immediately.
- ▶ If you own existing woodland or are establishing a new one then consider planting beech, hazel, sweet chestnut, cherry, oak, pine or larch and avoid planting significant amounts of birch, willow, alder and ash.
- ▶ Become a member of the Trust.

[www.redsquirrels.info](http://www.redsquirrels.info)

View red squirrels live on HPB Henllys' woodland webcam

[hpb-henllys.co.uk/squirrelcam](http://hpb-henllys.co.uk/squirrelcam)

## Pining for a bit of squirrel

The lofty pine trees surrounding HPB's Tigh Mor Trossachs home in Perthshire have proved a haven for red squirrels – not so much because reds prefer coniferous over deciduous, but because greys definitely don't.

The Scottish Forestry Commission's move to replace large swathes of pine forest with deciduous oak trees ought therefore to be bad news for red squirrels. That it isn't is thanks to the omnivorous pine marten.

Pine martens will eat pretty much anything, and are partial to a bit of squirrel. Grey or red, they have no preference – but greys, being foragers and ground feeders, are less agile and therefore more easily caught.

Pine trees or no pine trees – pine martens are to be encouraged!

