

# Glens Red Squirrel Group

Annual Report 2022/2023

Charity Number 102100



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# **GLENS RED SQUIRRELGROUP CHAIR'S REPORT**

## **Chairman's Report.**

This has been a quiet but busy year for the GRSG. This year we celebrated 15 years of Red Squirrel conservation in the Glens of Antrim and all our hard work is definitely making a positive impact on our Red Squirrels, natural environment and over all wildlife in the Glens.

This year our thoughts and prayers were with the Connolly family with the passing of one of our founding members, Frank Connolly in December. Frank had been a very active member within the group who was always first at any of our events and walks over the years. Frank will be missed and gave much to the group.

This year we also saw the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council's Biodiversity Officer; Rachel Bain leave the council. We have worked with Rachel over the last 12 years first with the Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust and then in council. We worked on several projects from tree planting, hedge planting to habitat enhancement with bird and bat boxes to list just a few. We did joint walks on council ground with each other as she was always willing to help. We wish Rachel all the best in her new ventures. At this current time there is a new Biodiversity Officer but we have yet to meet with them in their new role and we hope we can grow our links with the council.

Personally, Kelly and I have seen our family grow with the birth of our third son, Theo. This has been a bit of a change but thankfully have two great helpers now with Ben and Charlie who are always happy to go squirreling. They love helping scatter feeding and getting to see what we pick up on the trail cameras when we get home. In saying that at the start it was difficult to see a squirrel when out with them but I think the squirrels have got used to them now and we are seeing more reds when we are doing feeders.

Over this year I took part in the Ulster Wildlife's Red/Grey/Pine Marten survey work. I was able to cover 16 sites in all. These were sites along our buffer zones and historical sites for the survey. The sites picked up reds in most, a few Pine Martens and thankfully no greys. The results were given to Ross McIlwrath from Ulster Wildlife and we logged the information.

This year saw Squirreltober back to more or less normal with school visits, talks and walks. With things different after Covid (like grey squirrels we know it is still out there) getting back to the way it was pre Covid has been our aim. We have noticed that people are coming out to walks more and wanting us to come to them, which is great. We have even had booking for 2024 as other groups plan their programs and we look forward to more events in the next year.

The Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council's Mayor, Ivor Wallace held an event to recognise Gerard Mc Caughan's achievement as "Volunteer of the Year." The event was held in Ballycastle Council Offices and the committee were also invited. Mayor Wallace was really interested in what Gerard and our volunteers do as a group. He has promised to help us in any way he can.

I would like to thank all our volunteers who give up their time to do feeding, control, attend events and help in any way. The success of the Group is down to the work of our many volunteers.

Daniel McAfee, Chair of Glens Red Squirrel Group, 2021-2023

## **Grey Squirrel Control**

This year there was a total of 9 greys dispatched, all these were from the Cargan area, carried out by our volunteer in that area. This is a key area as it is preventing the movement of greys into Glenariff.

This takes the number of dispatches to 640 from 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2011 when the GRSG started recording Grey Squirrel dispatches or recorded road kills. We welcome all reports, regardless of the colour, please keep them coming. Those who are trapping are passing their information back to Daniel McAfee and all dispatches are logged in group records and in the Centre for Environmental Data and Recording (CEDaR).

We would encourage you to log any Red Squirrel you see no matter if it is a known red area, this gives us a good indicator of Red Squirrel activity patterns in the area.

## **CEDaR**

The information recorded is

Date

Grid Reference

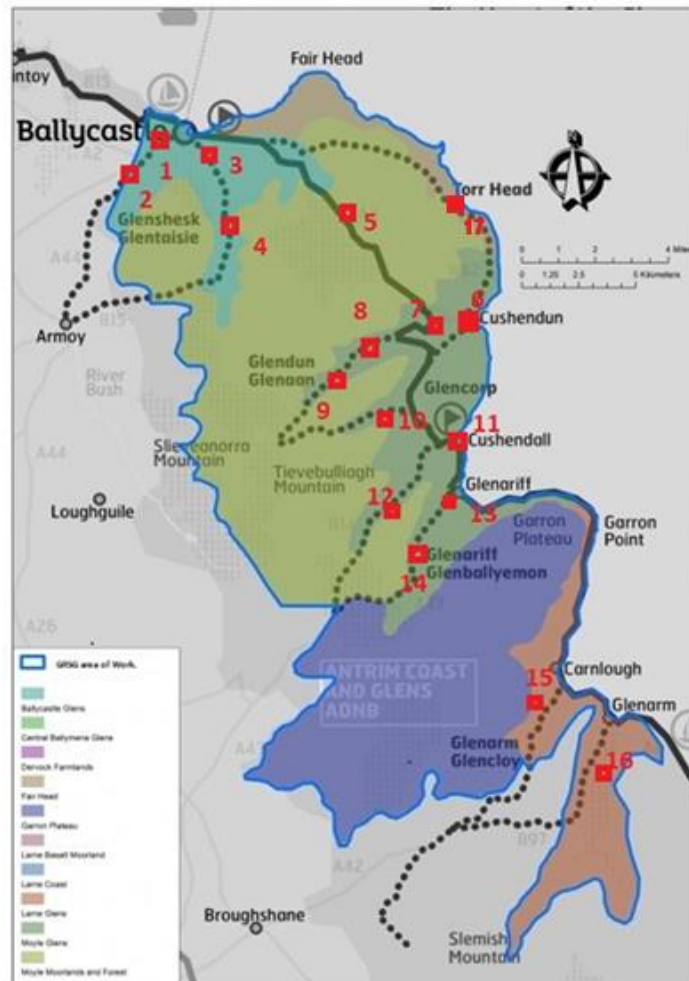
Sex of animal

Weight

Who Dispatched?

Date recorded to CEDaR

# General Report on Feed and Monitoring Sites.



## Working areas.

Feed sites that are open to the public to view are: -

- 1 Ballycastle Forest
- 5 Ballypatrick Forest (Suspended due to ongoing works)
- 6 Glenmona Cushendun
- 7 Cregagh Wood
- 11 Cottage Wood Cushendall
- 14 Glenariff Forest
- 16 Glenarm Forest.
- 15 Carnlough.

Feed sites that are permanent, but not open to the public: -

These sites are out of public view and are used to monitor if there has been any Grey Squirrel activity. Most of these sites have cameras covering them all the time. Some cameras are moved between sites as we have a limited number of cameras.

2 Glentaisie

5 Ballypatrick

8 & 9 Glendun

3 & 4 Glenshesk

17 Torr Head

Numbers of additional feed sites: -

Glenariff 6, Ballycastle 3, Cushendall 2, Capecastle 1, Moyarget 2, Ballypatrick 1, Cushendun 2, Tavanaghan 1, Gaults Road 1. These sites are not covered by camera but are in locations that Greys have been seen / reported or a grey has been removed from in the past. Cameras can be set on feeders if needed. Some of these sites are within private land / house holders gardens, who would report back to our Rangers if they see any grey activity takes place. We have other sites throughout the Glens that are privately maintained which we have limited input too unless requested to be looked in on, if owners are away, etc.

## **Active members report on their Feed / Monitoring Sites.**

### **Hanging Wood.**

A mix of Oak, Hazel, Ash and Holly with no Conifer trees. This mixed site has a wide range of tree ages. It has a variety of wildlife and plant life and is set aside, not to be grazed, but from time-to-time livestock (sheep) will get into the site. The site has a large Badger set with up to 10 Badgers living in it. This site was set up as a control site to impact on the number of Greys Squirrels that were making their way into Ballycastle Forest. The site had several greys when it was first set up and no Red Squirrels, after several greys had been removed, the reds returned.

This year the activity in this small woodland has been very mixed with the reds not as active as in previous years they had vanished for about 4 months only to reappear for a week or so and then go again. I do not think the visiting squirrels were the squirrels that had been resident previously. But over the last month the activity has picked up, the reds are showing singly but often. No greys have visited the site in the last year.

Daniel McAfee, Chair and GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger.

### **Ballycastle Forest.**

Ballycastle Forest is a mix of mature conifer blocks and broad leaf planting between 15-20 years old. One of the first sites for a GRSG observation site in 2008 and with assistance from the Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust was one of three "Squirrel Trails" in the Glens alongside Ballypatrick and Glenariff. These all became part of "The Glens Squirrel Safari's."

Ballycastle Forest has had a fantastic year for the reds and for the people who use the forest, with more people seeing reds when using the woods. Two things of note have happened over the last year;

1: We have a Red Squirrel that has become a bit of a celebrity with everyone on the lookout for him and knowing his name, this squirrel is called "Peter". This name came about, from having a chat with an elderly gent who walks the wood regularly and I mentioned, had he seen the red who was around the gate? He replayed, yes, Peter. Why do you call him that I asked, he is like St. Peter looking after the gates of Heaven and sure is not the forest just heaven to be in. So, the name has stuck and it is quite fitting with most of the regulars knowing him well now.

2: This year I have been doing live feeds on the Facebook page from "The Log" in Ballycastle Forest, this is simply a log that is just below one of the first feeders in Ballycastle Forest. The activity at the log has been great and very entertaining with birds from Robin, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Jays, Blackbird and of course Red Squirrels. I have been able to set the phone up and walk away about twelve feet from the log and the wildlife comes and feeds very happily. The log has also given several photographers the opportunity to set up and snap reds as they come and go. Many of them have sent their photographs to us and let us use them on our Facebook page.

This year in the forest we have found that some red females have had a late litter, kits were seen well into October. This has been common across many of the sites I have been working in and this is the fifth year it has happened. It could be the better autumn, warmer drier weather, or the females being in better condition, making reds have a third litter.

The squirrels also started to make their dreys early this year with many new dreys being made late December and like past years the dreys are made out in the open in many of the Birch trees or Hazel bushes.

We were able to pick up a few Red Stags in the forest this year as they passed through. Normally we would find Sika deer in the forest but we did not pick any up this year on camera. The Pine Marten is still in the forest and this year she has had three young. The female did move away from the feeding areas this year but this may be because of the increase in activity within the forest.

We have seen an increase in mountain bike activity in the forest on one morning there was 32 bikes, I asked, was there an event organised and was told that it was a Facebook post that had got out of hand and more people were showed up than they were expecting.

There has also been in an increase in dog walkers and from experience and talking to people who walk the forest they are being put off and, in some cases, harassed by dogs off the lead. Some of the dog owners get very confrontational when they are asked about their dog's behaviour.

The Forest Service also did some work over the last three months by removing all the Ash trees along the forest roadways. The work only took a few days and it had no impact on the squirrels or any of the activity of the wildlife in the woods.

Daniel McAfee, Chair and GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger.

## **Glenshesk.**

I have four permanent monitoring sites that cover the most of Glenshesk. They are visited every week with extra sites being added if I get sighting of a suspected Grey Squirrel. We have a healthy population of reds within Glenshesk. I am also lucky to have a few squirrel fanatics who have their own feeding station in their gardens. They keep me updated with the goings on of their Red Squirrels. We have two pairs of Pine Martins within the glen which have removed a few greys that have ventured my way.

Gerard Mc Caughan, GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger.

### **The Curragh.**

The trees in the Curragh are really doing well. On days gone by, this area would have been used to grow carrots and other root vegetables so the ground is very fertile. The Apple trees and the Cherry trees produced fruit last year, as did the Red and Black Currant bushes, not forgetting the many Rosehips and Blackberries. They all attract a lot of birds to them and you can always hear bird song anytime you walk through it.

Gerard Mc Caughan, GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger.

### **Carey.**

I have four permanent monitoring feeding stations in the wider Carey area as well as another three monitoring feeders that I move about, always trying to find more reds. Up until last year, Red Squirrels were only present at one site in Carey. They have now spreading out and I have them permanently at two of my sites. Tree cover (wooded areas) and sufficient food supplies, I feel are keeping them from expanding further. As in all areas there are a few farmers who do plant trees, unfortunately most do not see the benefit of having trees and the shelter they provide to their farms.

Gerard Mc Caughan, GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger.

### **Murlough Bay.**

Mixed planting in small blocks of Oak, Ash, Holly, Beech, Larch, and Scot Pine, mostly along rock faces and sheltered coves. We have had a monitoring site here since 2016 when the first grey was seen and removed.

Murlough has been visited several times this year and this is the first year we have seen a Pine Marten on camera here. We did not pick up any squirrels on the cameras. We did have a reported sighting of a red but we could not confirm that it was a red that was seen. Monitoring will continue to be carried out in the coming year; we may look more into the Hazel scrub rather than veins of mature forest that hug the ravines in Murlough as they may not offer the squirrels the cover they need. The deer population has increased in the area.

Daniel McAfee, Chair and GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger.

### **Torr Head.**

The site near Torr Head is a small slip of trees less than 3 acres in size that stretch from the sea up to the cliff face, at its widest point it would be about 30 meters and its thinnest point it would be 4-7 meters. The trees are a mix of Ash, Oak, Hazel, Holly and Sycamore all of various ages. The area has a small stream subject to rain fall that runs through it. You would drive past it before knowing you had.

There are now three or four reds in this area of Torr with two the most being seen on camera at any one time, but with size and colourer differences on camera there are more than two. The site is quite difficult to get to and was serviced once a month. But we did pick up in one month that we had at least five different Pine Martens over a few weeks. This was the most we have seen here; we knew there were two for sure in the area and they have been there from 2019. Its posable that these were their three young as there was no difference in size between three of them. The reds are not put off by the Pine Martins and continued to use the feeders.



Daniel McAfee, Chair and GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger.

### **Ballypatrick Forest.**

Ballypatrick Forest consist of large blocks of conifer planting with a small number of broad leaf trees which are all self-seeded. Originally part of the first Squirrel Trail but due to works within the forest of thinning and illegal felling, the squirrel population in the area vanished or moved on. We have found that squirrel activity in the area around the carpark has never picked up to the same as it was in 2015-2016 pre this disturbance.

This year saw large scale harvesting taking place in Ballypatrick Forest. Pine trees were removed from along the road side as part of the normal harvesting, this has opened the area up considerably.

Monitoring continues to taking place showed that there is several Pine Martens across the forestry and a large population of deer. Bird activity can be mixed depending on the location. Along the edges and boundary's, we have picked up Jays, Magpies, Crows and a wide mix of small birds. A good population of wood mouse across the forestry's and rat activity is isolated to areas near the main road/ carparks/ and near rivers or streams but more where people are active. For the large number of small rodents that were found, no owls were spotted in any of our monitoring sites sadly, but there are bound to be some within the forestry. From all reports, the number of field mice throughout the Glens has increased dramatically.

Daniel McAfee, Chair and GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger.

## **Cregagh Wood, Local Nature Reserve.**

The GRSG first developed a feeding and observation site at Cregagh Wood in 2009. The wood itself is an excellent example of an old mixed woodland and provides a varied habitat that lends itself well to nature trails. This has now become a well-established part of the group's areas of work. In 2015, the then Moyle District Council took on the management of the wood as its first Nature Reserve.



With changes in council, this then became the first Nature Reserve of the Causeway Coast and Glens Council. The Red Squirrel Hide was funded by the NGO Challenge fund and has been a great asset for us and the wood with the GRSG using it for events and photographers using it continuously.



In 2015 a single Great Spotted Woodpecker was spotted in the wood. Over the last few years, they have successfully had chicks and fledged young. This year seen the Great Spotted Woodpecker coming to the hide for the first time to use the feeders. This has been fantastic as it has resulted in an influx of professional photographers wanting to try and photograph it, the bird is very shy and does not stay long at the feeder.

There are several monitoring sites within the wood. These are covered by cameras and are a mix of scatter feed and feeder sites. The red population has continued to thrive but there has been an overall reduction in red numbers coming to the hide were before you could have had up to nine reds, but over recent months the number seen at any one time has reduced. The activity around the hide would normally pick up around December but this year it was February before the reds were seen in numbers regularly at the hide. I put it down to plenty of natural food within the woods.

We had several early morning live feeds via Facebook from the Hide and we have had reds appear at them all. The live stream has been picked up well for a non-advertised event on Facebook. We have had up to thirty people join to watch, which is fantastic as we would not have got this number if people had to attend in person.

The wild life in the woods across all the sites has been very active and we have had a few additions to the woods that we have not had before. We now have a few Deer, a pair of Ravens who have just arrived over the last few weeks, one Badger has been seen and an increase in Pine Marten numbers, to at least four. We do know that the female had three Kitts (two males and a female) this year as we were able to get them on our camera traps. The female stayed and the two young males moved down Glendun where they were picked up on several of the monitoring cameras along the glen, but they did return to the woods. It maybe that they got as far as the large male who is at the far end of Glendun and they could not get beyond him. There is another adult male in the woods, he has been seen with the female a few times.



The Hide this year has seen a fantastic run over the last few months with it being booked by individuals and small groups of photographers. We have had people from Dublin, Letterkenny, Bangor, Belfast, Cookstown and Newcastle to name just a few. Some of the people have been members of other N.I. Squirrel Groups and when asked why have they come to our Hide, they said it is because they were guaranteed to see reds. Unfortunately, this is one guarantee we cannot provide when people are booking. We really are getting great feedback from those who are attending the Hide and we have been offered advise on how we can add to the set up here.

Daniel McAfee, Chair and GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger.

## **Glendun.**

Apart from the Glenmona and Cregagh Wood there are three additional monitoring sites, these are along the river Dun on private ground within Glendun. These sites have cameras as they are near areas that had been in the past, part of control programs. We have seen a great reduction in the number of greys being picked up in these sites. The reason for this may be because we have been very vocal in the area about the illegal release of greys that we have suspected over the last number of years. This last year has seen these sites pick up only one Grey Squirrel and this animal was not picked up on camera again or at any other site in Glendun. This has been fantastic news; it may be because the Pine Martens have been moving about and may have got the grey or the grey has got their scent and moved on.

Daniel McAfee, Chair and GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger

## **Glenmona Feed site and Playground.**

The Playground had been temporary stood down due to grey activity a few years ago but was reinstated at the end of 2021 as we had no grey sightings in the overall area of Glendun. Red numbers in and around Glenmona grow from strength to strength with the partnership between GRSG at the playground and National Trust Rangers feeding in and around their workshop. Several feeders are now located around the Glenmona grounds in gardens and on private land. A few caravan owners have feeders also and they help when trap monitoring is needed. Several landowners in the area were also given feeders to monitor and they have had great success removing any greys that did pop up. With this monitoring system in place, it is hoped that the greys will not become a problem again in the playground.



We get a lot of reports and photographs from people who use the car park and the gardens of Glenmona about seeing Red Squirrels in the trees and using the feeders. These reports show us that people do appreciate the work that the Glens Red Squirrel Group do within the Glens of Antrim and further afield.

Daniel McAfee, Chair and GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger.

### **Cushendall and Cottage Wood.**

The Cottage Wood, a Council site and part of our “Red Squirrel Safari Trail,” is a mixed mature woodland containing Sweet Chestnut, Scots Pine, Beech, Sycamore and Ash trees. At present there are feed stations within the Cottage Wood, at Gaults Road and the Glenville areas, all these feeders are being well attended with five reds seen at the one time at a feeder within the Cottage Wood. There are also feeders located with eight households in the general area and all seem to be visited by reds and are being maintained by the families themselves.



On a negative note, however the River Walk in Cushendall was maintained for five months with five feed stations without any success so the feeders have been removed. I will be monitoring the area and the feeders will be returned if reds are seen to be in the area again. Two sightings of greys were reported and despite my best efforts for several weeks not a single grey has been spotted again.

Laurence McAlister, GRSG Volunteer.

## **Glenariff and Parkmore Forest Park**

In Glenariff Forest Park there are a healthy number of reds which visit the feeders regularly. The Perspex feeders that were introduced last year seem to be a hit with the squirrels and photographers.



Paul McHugh, GRSG Volunteer

## **Martinstown and Glenravel.**

I continue to monitor a couple of areas in Cargan and have removed several greys, mainly from Ben's planting where with control, the number of greys sighted is declining. We had a Red Squirrel sighted a few times at Ben's late last year, hopefully it is still in the area.

Paul McHugh, GRSG Volunteer

## **Ballyeamon Barn.**

The barn continues to welcome members of the Glens Red Squirrel Group committee for their monthly meetings. Sadly, since the total felling of the forest behind Ballyeamon Barn our Red Squirrels have moved on. Apart from a one-off sighting of a large Grey Squirrel there have been no sightings at all of reds to report. If the Forest Service had even left one stand of trees for our reds this report might have been more optimistic but the bleak barren landscape behind the premises is not conducive as a habitat for man or beast.

Liz Weir, GRSG Volunteer

## **Garron Point.**



This is a photo of a red that visits my garden in Garron Point regularly. I have a very busy bird feeder close by. They see the nuts in the feeder and try to peck them, quite amusing. My reds have produced two, possibly three kittens and they are busy dashing around my garden.

Elizabeth Gracey, GRSG Member.

## **Carnlough.**

The waterfalls are still officially closed because of a landslide last year so my main area for feed stations is the nearby quarry and Waterfall Rd. I have seven feed boxes located in these areas.

Volunteers throughout the glen maintain about twelve feeders in their gardens or close to where they live.

Activity at the feeders was quite last summer and autumn, but since Christmas, activity has picked up and since the snow in January, feeders have needed replenished weekly. In general, sightings have become more frequent over the past year with numerous kits sighted in various locations. So, our efforts seem to be paying off with greater numbers of sightings.

Gabriel McAuley, Deputy Chair and GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger.

## **Glenarm.**

This has been a good year for the Glenarm Red Squirrels. Most people who have walked within the forest have seen a red at one time or another. The feeders are regularly refilled by our volunteer, Colin Urwin and this keeps the reds coming to the feeders.

## **GRSG Rangers Reports.**

These are GRSG Volunteers who have committed to giving extra time to actively pursue Red Squirrel conservation work on behalf of the group. They are badged representatives of the group, having a sound knowledge of both Red and Grey Squirrels. They can train volunteers in Grey Squirrel Control (as a non-native alien species), have knowledge of the legislation governing wildlife protection and animal welfare. They can co-ordinate volunteer activity and expand public knowledge on Red Squirrel Conservation and Grey Squirrel Control, as well as having an understanding and experience of practical conservation.

### **Daniel McAfee's Report.**

This year has been quite as far as trapping is concerned, but otherwise a busy year. Feeding and monitoring still takes place on all my sites and this year I only picked up one grey and it was only a fleeting visit from it at one of my scatter feed sites in Cushendun. This has been my quietest year to date for Greys Squirrel control, but I know I cannot become complacent that a grey or greys could pop up at any time.

Over the year I was able to get out and about with presentations and talks to groups Covid had seen activities like this stop. So, it was good to get back out to groups and schools across Squirreltober and a few invited talks. I have had two bookings for 2024 already, I know from taking to different groups, they are only starting to find their feet again and organise programs for talks.

This year I took part in the Ulster Wildlife's Red / Grey / Pine Marten Survey Work. I was able to cover sixteen sites in all. These were sites along our buffer zones. The sites picked up reds in most, a few Pine Martins and thankfully no greys.

This year I have also had a few days with award winning Photographer, Tom McDonnell in our sites to try and assist him with getting photos of "Glens of Antrim" Pine Martens. I have Pine Martens now in all my feed sites and many of my monitor sites, so knowing the sites was easy, the hard work was up to Tom to try and get them on camera and the results so far are fantastic and I cannot wait to see more from him.

The booking of the Hide mainly goes through me and I have been lucky enough to be dealing with a mix of novices, semi-professional, and professional photographers from all over N. Ireland and Ireland, many send us their photos to use on our Facebook page. During all visits to the Hide, people are asked to log their visit in the Hide Log Book and record what they see while there, I have found that many of the professional photographers do not actually do this and when posting their own photos, they won't state where they took them. But we know where they took them. It is fantastic to see the photographs people are getting.

Daniel McAfee, Chair and GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger.

### **Gabriel McAuley's Report.**

It has been a very quiet year. One grey was sighted at Largy Road, both from the d last summer with traps set but no success. However, a dead grey was sighted at Branch Rd./ Coast Rd. about a week later (road kill).

I attended several GRSG events over the year, including the Glenarm Forest walk in the Autumn which I felt was poorly attended and organised the yearly Quiz in Laragh Lodge which was a great success from both the reports received from attendees and from a fundraising aspect. I continue to repair and replace worn feeders as need be.

Gabriel McAuley, Deputy Chair and GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger.

### **Gerard Mc Caughan's Report.**

Monitoring Activities continue through the year as always. Thankfully we had no Squirrel Pox or any other setback. I attended several GRSG events and organised the Hide open days in April which are always well attended. I continue with my Equipment Caretaker role which keeps me busy through the year.

Gerard Mc Caughan, GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger.

## **Equipment Report.**

We applied for and were successful with the Rural Micro Capital Grant Scheme 2022 again this year, which is provided by Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and administered by the Northern Area Community Network. With the aid of the Micro Grant, we have been able to maintain our equipment at a level that keeps all our many volunteers supplied.

The usual Annual Equipment Audit was conducted in January 2023 and was completed by the end of February.

We had to replace one of the two laptops that the group have, as the operating system was going out of date. This laptop is used by our members secretary to hold all membership records and needs to comply with current regulations on data security.

Gerard Mc Caughan, GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger and Equipment Caretaker.

## **Squirreltober Report 2022.**

This year, we had a very successful and mixed Squirreltober. It was mixed in many ways, the weather playing a big part, in general weather was warm and wet meaning that autumn was about two weeks or so later than previous years. The trees in the first week in November, were still holding on to their leaves making it difficult to spot Red Squirrels. This has been a bumper year for wild food which resulted in the squirrels abandoning our feeders to take full advantage of what natural food that was available. So, squirrel sighting on our walks and events have been down on previous years but we did have a few more natural chance sightings of squirrels running in the trees tops with lots of leaves making it a real challenge or as the reds dashed across the forest floors or across paths and road ways as our walks took place.

Attendance on our public walks was medium to fair this year compared to last year when we were over booked on all our events, this was because we were coming out of lockdowns and everyone just wanted to get out and about. Now that we are back to normal there may be a different focus on things. The wet weather may have been also a factor for people not coming out to explore the Glens on our Squirrel Safaris, those who did attend all gave great feedback even if Red Squirrels had not been seen.

Our calendar at planning stage was almost full but quickly grew within the first week, so much so that we were unable to fit everything in. We had two school events that ran over into November so that no one would miss out.

This year for the first time that National Red Squirrel week was held back into October. Historically held in the last week of September, this was the main reason that the GRSG started Squirreltober because "National Red Squirrel Week" just is not long enough to showcase our Red Squirrels here in the Glens. So Squirreltober was started so that our squirrels, our Glens, our volunteers, and our work could be highlighted and give people from all over, the opportunity to get out and explore the Glens with the chance to see a Red Squirrel or two or three. With National Red Squirrel in October and the GRSG Squirreltober events we were able to highlight the plight of the Red Squirrel.

We had our Squirrel Safaris, two Safaris with story walks, council meeting with the mayor to highlight the work done by the GRSG, school visits, school walks, radio interview, press cover in print and online, Facebook posts across the month and two talks in Corrymeela.

### **1<sup>st</sup> October 2022, Radio Ulster.**

Our Chair, Daniel McAfee was interviewed on Radio Ulster's Ann Marie McAleese radio program. This was a great opportunity to kick start Squirreltober. Daniel and Anne Marie talked all about the Red Squirrels within the Glen and the work that we do to ensure their survival. They also talked about all the events that we had organised for the month of October across the Glens to help people get out there to try and spot reds and explore the Glens at the same time throughout Squirreltober. As a group, we would like other Red Squirrel Groups to also take on Squirreltober and arrange their own events to make the month of October a nationwide event.

### **1<sup>st</sup> October 2022, Glenarm Red Squirrel Safari**



Liz O'Connor, Forest Guide and Gabriel McAuley, Vice Chair and Squirrel Ranger took the walk around the forest, unfortunately there was a very poor turn out for this walk and no squirrels were seen.



### **7<sup>th</sup> October 2022, Quiz Night, Laragh Lodge.**

A great night was had by all and Gabriel McAuley, ably supported by his wife, Mary, provided us with many a challenge and head scratcher. A great night was had by all with lots of laughs.

### **8th October 2022, Talks to Corrymeela Community.**

The group were invited to Corrymeela to give two talks one for children and one for adults. The children ranged from 6-15 years old with their parents in total about 20 children and 10 adults. We did our Power Point Presentation, showed our videos from our trail cameras, did a little squirrel craft and went for a wild life walk around the grounds of Corrymeela to see what we could find and what the squirrels would eat.



The second talk was to 25-30 adults. We gave a talk on the work we do in the Glens and how our work has helped red areas across N. Ireland, we talked about the issues that still face reds and about the importance of Grey Squirrel control across the country. The overall view on grey control was positive



### **9th October 2022, Cottage Wood Cushendall, Red Squirrel Safari.**

This walk was led by our Chair and Squirrel Ranger, Daniel assisted by Tom Naughton and Laurence McAlister. A small turn out but a great enthusiast group. Lots of plant and tree identified and lots of small birds were seen, unfortunately no squirrels. There was lots of interest in the work that the group does in the area.

We hope that those on the walk will return to the Cottage Woods to explore this great wood and park, one of the few within the Causeway Coast and Glens Council area that has Red Squirrels.



Inkcap Mushroom.



Beech Masts

### **11th October 2022, Talk in St Ciaran's PS, Cushendall.**

Last week our Chair and Squirrel Ranger Daniel McAfee visited St. Ciaran's PS Cushendun. Daniel gave a talk about the local Red Squirrels in Glendun, showed some of the footage of reds and other wildlife we have within the Glens and explained about the work we the GRSG do and have done over the years. There were lots of very good question and great interest. It was fantastic to hear that it did not stop when Daniel left!!

The children did some fantastic art work and produced brilliant fact file posters. All put together to create brilliant class room displays!!

Seeing this all has made our day!!





These children are our future Glens men and women and education in our environment heritage is a must to spark an interest now that will grow and hopefully stay with them no matter where life takes them.

A big thank you to the staff at St. Ciaran's PS.

### **12th October, Outdoor Learning with two local primary schools.**

Chair Daniel McAfee took eighty-four pupils and six staff from St. Patricks and St Brigid's PS along with Ballycastle Integrated PS on a Red Squirrel Safari of Ballycastle Forest. Unfortunately, no Red Squirrels were seen but with eighty-four kids that was to be expected. We covered lots of topics from tree and plant identification, seed distribution and of course Red Squirrel Conservation. There were a lot of interesting question asked off Daniel which he was delighted about. It is great to see our children so interested in the natural world. We did see a large Buzzard as it fly over the path as we walked in the forest.



### 13<sup>th</sup> October 2022, Field trip with Home Schooling Children.

Another first for the GRSG. Chair Daniel McAfee took a group of home-schooled children and their family on a Squirrel Safari. This was to be the first of two groups in the month. We had a fantastic walk the weather was great with the temperature being 16 degrees, very warm for this time of year. We did see a squirrel, at first it was for just sitting still, but then it put on a bit of a show as it made its way through the Larch trees everyone got a great view of it and how fast it was. We covered tree and seed identification, seed distribution and our local wildlife that call the woodlands and forestry's their home. A fantastic day.



**15th October 2022, Cregagh Wood Hide open day.**



Chair, Daniel McAfee with seven others attended the Hide open day. Unfortunately, with the volume of wild food in the woods there were no squirrels calling to the Hide but the woods are about two weeks behind in preparing for Winter. Bird activity was very low as well around the Hide with the only real bird hanging about being a Robin. It was noted by one of the locals who attended that their garden had also seen a drop-in bird activity in the last two to three weeks.

**19<sup>th</sup> October 2022, Home School Children walk in Ballycastle Forest.**

Second Group of home school children and families. A larger group than the first time. The same topics were covered and all enjoyed the walk, sadly no reds were seen on this visit but all will be back now they know where to look.

**20th October 2022, Ballycastle Forest Safari.**

Chair, Daniel McAfee took another group of thirty primary three pupils and six staff from St. Patricks and St Brigid's PS along with Ballycastle Integrated PS on a Red Squirrel Safari of Ballycastle Forest. They were split into two groups on the day with each group doing part of the Ballycastle Safari and the second group doing some forest school learning at the entrance of the forest. As it was a very warm day (17degrees) everyone was getting eaten my midges. We were all lucky to see a Red Squirrel as it crossed above use in the Beech Trees.



**22th October 2022, Glenariff Forest Red Squirrel Safari, and Story Walk.**

Walk lead by Liz O'Connor for the GRSG with Janice Witherspoon as the story teller. A great walk with a mix of story and forest facts. This walk was in partnership with the Storytelling Festival. There was a charge for this walk as part of the festival we received a donation. seven attended and it was well received.





**23rd October 2022, Cregagh Wood Story walk.**

Walk lead by Chair Daniel McAfee for GRSG and Story teller Janice Witherspoon. A different type of woodland visits for many on the walk. Sadly, no reds were seen but lots of topics were covered and lots of story's, a very enjoyable walk for all. We had fifteen in attendance.



Feedback from one of the attendees *"I had the privilege to take part in the forest walk with Glens Red Squirrel Group on 23rd October 2022 Sunday, as part of the Glens Storytelling Festival. I enjoyed so much the interesting stories of our forest guide (I forgot his name), who worked in perfect harmony with storyteller Janice Witherspoon. The stories of science, everyday stories, of people and nature, intertwined with folktales, folklore just arrived right into our heart. I am a storyteller from Hungary, and from what has been mentioned, I remembered a story about a beech tree. The guides of the walk generously let me share that story – end in spite of the pouring rain, everyone appreciated it. It has been an event of openness, sharing, community and of course, raising awareness of the precious red squirrels of the land.*

*Maja Bumberák, Hungary, Budapest"*



### **29<sup>th</sup> October 2022, Ballycastle Red Squirrel Safari.**

Walk lead by Chair, Daniel McAfee assisted by Liz and Petra (Forest Service Educational Guides). A great walk to end Squirreltober, with fifteen in attendance, a mix of children and adults. We covered tree and seed identification, woodland wildlife, Red Squirrels, the work we do in the Glens and much more. In all five reds were seen by some, Daniel only saw four, as the others were lucky to see one cross the path while Daniel talked about the work we do in the Glens.

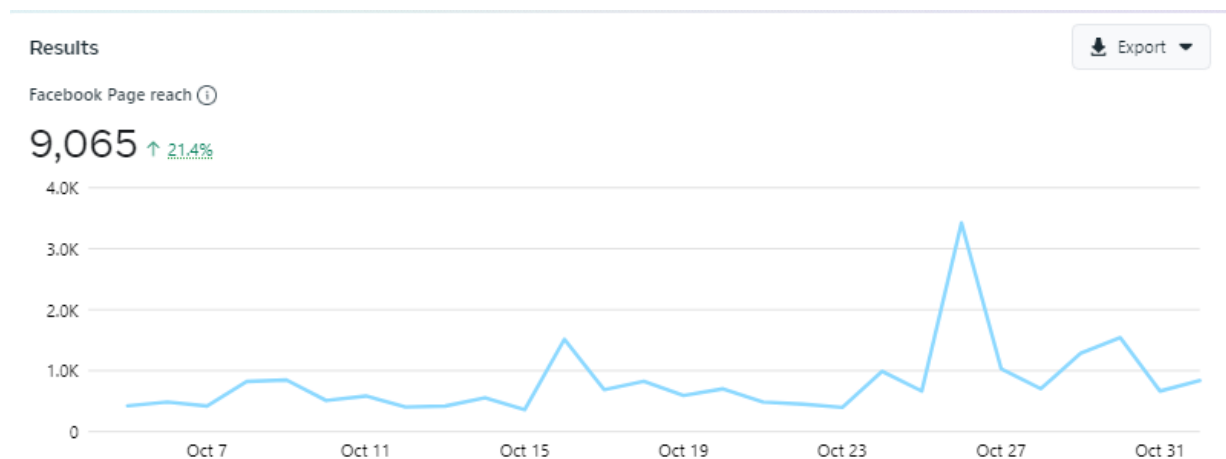






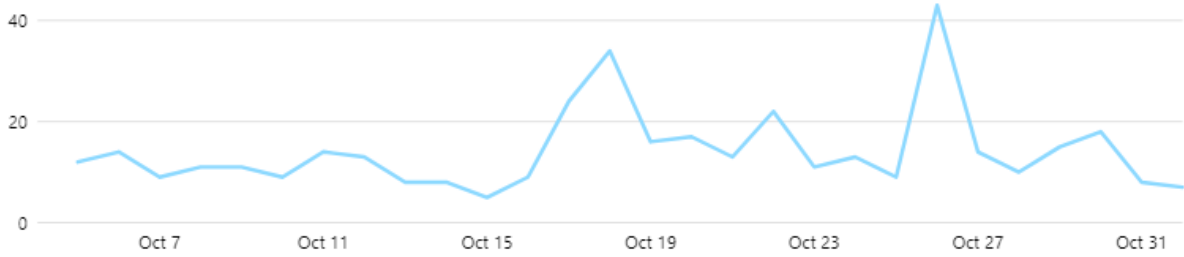
Over Squirreltober we had a Red Squirrel spotted by several people running along Castle Street in Ballycastle. We also had videos sent through of very young kits in Glendun. This is very late for young squirrels but with the weather being so mid it not surprising. We have had young reds in October before in Ballycastle Forest and in Glenarm Forest. We received videos from Glenariff Forest Park and photographs that people were able to snap while out in the Glens.

**We posted over Facebook and here are some of the results for over October.**



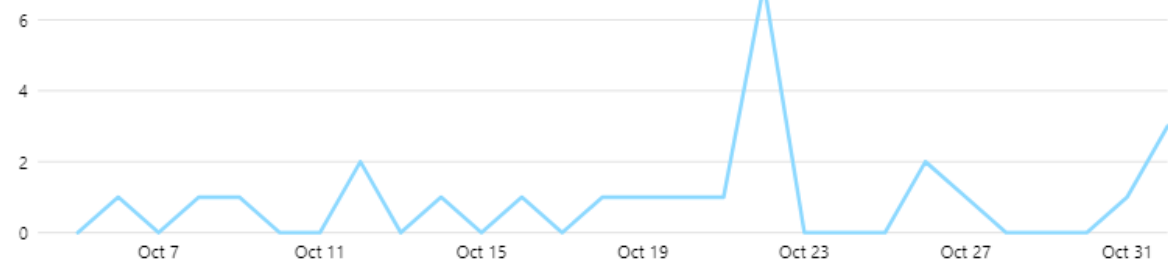
Facebook Page visits ⓘ

397 ↑ 93.7%



Facebook Page new likes ⓘ

25 ↑ 47.1%



Top 7 Most reached posts over October.

Recent content ↑↓	Type	Reach ⓘ ↓	Likes and reactio... ⓘ ↑↓	Sticker taps ⓘ ↑↓
Sun Oct 23, 10:00pm	Post	Boost post	4,243	28
Sat Oct 29, 10:14am	Post	Boost post	2,597	91
Sat Oct 15, 11:00pm	Post	Boost post	2,121	26
Tue Oct 25, 11:00pm	Post	Boost post	1,251	107
Wed Oct 19, 5:03pm	Post	Boost unavailable	969	32
Tue Oct 18, 7:51am	Post	Boost unavailable	834	31
Tue Nov 1, 7:21am	Post	Boost unavailable	776	9

**Over Squirreltober we engaged with**

279 children across local schools, home school network, talks and walks.  
 112 adults across walks, talks, and schools.

1 live radio broadcast

Several Facebook pages e.g., Love Ballymena, Causeway Coast News.

Papers; News Letter, Belfast Telegraph, The Ballymena/Coleraine/Ballycastle Chronicle

Events advertised on Ulster Wildlife and the UK Squirrel Accord web site.

We visited five forests and woods within the Glens of Antrim.

## Squirreltober Thanks

A BIG thanks to all who helped or took part in this year's Squirreltober. Thanks to the Forest Service educational guides, Liz and Petra, for assistance on walks and to The Glens Storytelling Guild for entertaining us on many of our walks with their very interesting stories. Our GRSG volunteers who helped and keep feeders stocked over the year to help our reds and to make sure that our visitors get the chance to see Red Squirrels. Janice Witherspoon, The Storytelling Festival, Causeway Coast and Glen's Mayor, Ivor Wallace, SDLP Glens Councillor, Margret Anne McKillop, Pupils and Staff of St. Ciaran's PS Cushendun, St. Patrick's and St Brigid's PS, Ballycastle Integrated PS, Anne Marie McAleese's Your Place and Mine BBC Radio Ulster, Corrymeela Community, Laragh Lodge, The News Letter, Belfast Telegraph, The Ballymena/Coleraine/Ballycastle Chronicle, Ulster Wildlife, UK Squirrel Accord, Northern Ireland Forest Service and other groups who helped us out during the month from practical tasks to putting up our events on their Facebook pages, etc..

Hope to see you all again next year.

## Forest Service Northern Ireland and GRSG Partnership.

Over the last number of years and from the formation of the group we have worked with the Forest Service Northern Ireland. This partnership in our early years was vital to the work we did and still do in the Glens. Forestry Service properties (Ballycastle, Breen, Ballypatrick, Glenariff and Glenarm) offer an opportunity for members of the public to access large areas to walk and run and the opportunity to meet its wildlife. This is where we, with our feeding sites give people the chance to see our native Red Squirrels that make the forestries their home.

This partnership has allowed us to highlight the fact that "Yes" we do have Red Squirrel in the Glens.

An issue we had found is that people did not know we had Red Squirrels in Northern Ireland let alone in the Glens but with our work with the Forest Service NI and within their Forestry's we are educating



the young and the not so young about NOT only Red Squirrels but about much of the plants and animals that call these areas their homes.

The Forest Service NI have supported us with feed for two of the sites that we operate in across the Glens, the two sites supported are Glenariff and Glenarm. We are very grateful for this support as feed is a large outgoing for the group and one of the most important parts of the work we do. By providing supplementary feed for adults and young reds, we have found that Red Squirrel numbers are increasing and so they are expanding to new areas.

Thankfully our healthy Red Squirrel numbers are linked with the overall health of our Red Squirrels. Our volunteers do keep a close check on our squirrels' conditions. Part of this good health is down to very little encroachment of Grey Squirrels within the Forest Service NI property's that we work in. We believe there are several reasons for this, one is because of the public's vigilance and forestry staff's vigilance as they are quick to report to us any greys they see. A second reason is because most of Forest Service NI properties in the Glens are home to Pine Martens. The presents of Pine Martens do have a negative impact on Grey Squirrel behaviour and abundance in an area, the concentration of Pine Martens in Forest Service NI properties vary from property to property but we do pick them up when monitoring and going about our work.

The Forest Service NI staff that we have made links with within the Glens area are a vital asset to the work we do and assisting us with that work. If it's topping up feed bins, informing us of work taking place or assisting with activities. We must give a BIG THANKS to Forest Service NI Educational Guide, Liz O'Connor and Petra, who has assisted with education walks that we have held over the last year, their knowledge and manner of portraying this knowledge to those on the walk is brilliant. They are both a true asset to the Forest Service NI. We also must thank Jim Marshall. Jim has been key in our planning for setting up site in areas to ensure no works are planned that could impact on equipment, etc. We also feedback to Jim on any issues we may find on our weekly duties in the Forest Service NI properties, such as fallen trees that may cause injury to the public, any damage to roads, fences bridges and any damage done due to weather or antisocial behaviour such as fly tipping etc. This works well for us and we hope, also for the Forestry Service NI too. We also want to thank the men in Glenariff forestry yard, they are more than willing to help and they keep an eye on the reds in the yard as well, they all are very helpful and we are very grateful.

Over all we see this partnership going from strength to strength for the protection of Red Squirrels in the Glen and we are very grateful for it. Over this year we have seen more work taking place across many of the forests in the Glens. The Forest Service have let us know of new works in the forest and we were able to add more forests to our licenses agreement and hope to start work in them soon.



# 2022-23 Monthly Reports

May 2022.



Tom and Joe enjoying an event in Glenmona House, Glendun.

## 11<sup>th</sup> May 2022, Feeder Workshop in Glenmona.

Feeder work shop at Glenmona House Cushendun. The numbers attending was low but in saying that, 15 feeders were put together on the night.



**July 2022.**

**4th July 2022, Cushendun Decides.**

“Cushendun Split the Pot” at the Cushendun Church. We were lucky to have our small project selected called “Welcome to Our woods” We were awarded £500



The GRSG project was to provide two Pine Martin Den boxes, Bat boxes, Bird nest boxes, Information plaques as well as some feed for the Red Squirrels. The project will be carried out by the Glens Red Squirrel Group and volunteers willing to help with the erection of boxes.

**August 2022.**

**6<sup>th</sup> August 2022, Red Bay Lifeboat Station 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Open day.**

The Group was contacted by the RLNI and asked if we would like to provide an information and awareness stall. Raymie and Liz consequently set up a table, alongside other information providers, inside the RLNI station building.

There were thousands of people in attendance. A lot of support and interest was shown towards the aims of the GRSG. They were surprised by the number of passing public who were very aware of our

group and the positive work that we do to maintain a healthy Red Squirrel population in the Glens of Antrim.

The public were also very aware of the ongoing issues of Grey Squirrel control. This was clearly demonstrated by the fact that approximately one in five people who passed by the stall had a first-hand story to relate of having spotted Red Squirrels and knew of the issues that Grey Squirrels caused to both reds and the environment in general. We find this appreciation of the facts regarding greys very heartening. Many children and their parents were interested in learning more about Red Squirrels.

Raymie Watson.



Committee members Liz Weir and Raymond Watson on the information stand at Red Bay Lifeboat's Open Day in August as part of the Heart of the Glens Festival in Cushendall.

## **September 2022,**

### **BBC Wildlife Magazine!!!**

Great to see our very own Glensheshk man, Gerard McCaughan featuring in this month's BBC Wildlife magazine for his Red Squirrel Survival Trust Volunteer of the Year Award. Gerard was the 1st person in the UK to be presented with the David Stapleford Award.

Well done Gerard we at the GRSG thank you for all your hard work in the Glens and so do our Red Squirrels!

To see more about the award and Gerard being presented his award by Mark Henderson from the RSST, see link.

<https://www.rsst.org.uk/gerard-mccaughan-rsst-volunteer.../>

## October 2022.

See **full report** on the **Squirreltober events** earlier in this document.

### 10<sup>th</sup> October 2022, Reception held in Mayor's Parlour.

The Mayor of the Causeway Coast and Glens Council, Alderman Ivor Wallace, held a reception in Ballycastle for the Glens Red Squirrel Group's Committee to recognise the "Volunteer of the Year" award received by Gerard Mc Caughan from the Red Squirrel Survival Trust.



The David Stapleford Trophy.



The Committee with Alderman Ivor Wallace

He also wanted to acknowledge the work that we do for Red Squirrels. He was very interested in our work and said that he did not realise the number of events and school visits that we undertake. He believes like us, that education is the way forward.

### **26<sup>th</sup> October 2022, Baby Red Squirrel seen in Cushendun.**

Baby reds in October yes!! The Hamilton family were up close view of a family of kits while out walking in Cushendun. We have had baby reds in October in the past but it not that common. With the mild weather it caused some of our red females to have a third litter.

### **November 2022.**

#### **22<sup>nd</sup> November 2022, Photographer Jonny Collins visit.**

Jonny Collins arranged to visit to get footage and photographs of Reds Squirrels in the Glens. Jonny has visited us several time over the last six / seven years for different projects “The Chronicle of the Glens” being just one of them. On this visit the reds did not disappoint and he was able to get some great shots. He even got to meet Peter, the squirrel at the gate. Johnny was happy with what he had got and we didn’t have to go any further than Ballycastle in all we seen six squirrels on the walk not all as happy to sit as Peter was.



#### **25<sup>th</sup> November 2022, Erection in Cregagh Wood of Nest boxes and Information plagues.**

We erected the Information signs; Bird Nest Boxes, Bat Boxes and a Pine Martin Den Box in Cregagh Wood from the grant that we were awarded in our Project “Welcome to our Woods” as part of “Cushendun Decides.”







**January 2023.**

**9<sup>th</sup> January 2023, Antrim RSPB.**

Our first talk of the year was for the Antrim RSPB group. Chair, Daniel McAfee attended and gave a talk to the group about the work we do here in the Glens. This is not the first time that we talked to the group, we talked to them a few years ago. It was good to give them an update and let them know how well we are getting on. There was much interest about the Hide and hopefully some of them will attend to see reds for themselves.



The Antrim Branch were delighted with the talk and said this on their Facebook page about the talk.

*“Our first speaker of 2023 was Daniel McAfee from the Glens Red Squirrel Group, a grassroots conservation organisation established in 2008 to protect and maintain the population of native Red Squirrels in the Glens of Antrim. Daniel spoke passionately and engagingly about the work of the group which includes guided walks, educational events, monitoring of Red and Grey Squirrels and Grey Squirrel control in the areas where Reds are present.”*

**21<sup>st</sup> January 2023, Ballycastle Red Squirrel Safari.**

This was a walk arranged to mark the formation of the Glens Red Squirrel Group. It was well attended with everyone getting to see a Red Squirrel. We also had a very, very friendly Blackbird who did not want the squirrel getting all the attention. Our Chair and Squirrel Ranger, Daniel McAfee, was able to point out the red that was feeding in the Larch along the forest path. It would have been easy to miss amount the branches and twigs making it a difficult subject to photograph, but John Mason was able to get some great photos.



## February 2023.

### 5th February 2023, Gardeners Corner.

BBC Radio Ulster's Gardeners Corner, broadcast every Saturday morning and this morning it was coming from Glenmona House, Glendun. During the recording off one of the interviews, they spotted a Red Squirrel using our Red Squirrel Playground which we have in the gardens of Glenmona House. After a brief discussion about the reds in Glenmona, the program continued as planned.

### 17<sup>th</sup> February 2023, Media student visit.

Media student, Cora McGoldrick got in touch with us wanting to do a short interview and to see if we could point her in the right direction to see some local wildlife in the Ballycastle area. She was hoping to produce an item about the environment in Northern Ireland and its effect on people and if society was doing enough to protect and save it. We took a short walk up Ballycastle forest and she was able to get lots of small birds and was also able to see three Red Squirrels, which she was able to get on camera. We look forward to seeing the result.

## March 2023.

### 4<sup>th</sup> March 2023, Ballynure Nature Day







## Reflection on our work over the years from 2015/2016 to 2022/2023

Over this year the group have taken part in, and attended less events than pre pandemic but this is to be expected as things try and get back to normal.

This is a brief breakdown of the group's year from 2015 to 2023. These hours do not include hours that volunteers put into feeding, Grey Squirrel Control, monitoring, survey work or committee meetings.

### 2015-2016

Talks	6	Average 1-1.5 hours	Average total hours 9h
Information table	11	Average 3-4 hours	Average total hours 36h
Walks	13	Average 2-2.5 hours	Average total hours 32.5h
Meetings	11	Average 1-3 hours	Average total hours 33h
Activities	10	Average 1-2.5 hours	Average total hours 25h

Total 141.5 hours.

### 2016-2017

Talks	10	Average 1-1.5 hours	Average total hours 10.5h
Information table	6	Average 3-4 hours	Average total hours 24h
Walks	14	Average 2-2.5 hours	Average total hours 35h
Meetings	7	Average 1-3 hours	Average total hours 33h

Total 87 hours

### 2017-2018

Talks	6	Average 1-1.5 hours	Average total hours 9h
Information table	7	Average 3-4 hours	Average total hours 28h
Walks	12	Average 2-2.5 hours	Average total hours 30h
Meetings	3	Average 1-3 hours	Average total hours 7.5h
Activities	2	Average 1-2.5 hours	Average total hours 5 h
Hide openings	5	Average 2-2.5 hours	Average total hours 12.5h

Total 92 hours

### 2019-2020

Talks	5	Average 1-1.5 hours	Average total hours 7.5h
Information table	5	Average 3-4 hours	Average total hours 12h
Walks	2	Average 2-2.5 hours	Average total hours 5h
Meetings	1	Average 1-3 hours	Average total hours 3h
Hide opening	5	Average 2-2.5 hours	Average total hours 12.5h
Total 40hours			

### **2020-2021**

Walks	5	Average 2-2.5 hours	Average total hours 12.5h
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Total 12.5h

### **2021-2022**

Talks 2		Average 1-1.5hours	Average total hours 3
Walks 6		Average 2-2.5hours	Average total hours 15
Stalls 1		Average 3-4 hours	Average total hours 4
Facebook live 4		Average 30min -1hour	Average total hours 4
Litter picking 1		Average 1hour	Average total hours 1
Car boot sale		Average 3-4 hours	Approx. hours 25

Approx. hours 50 +

### **2022-2023**

Talks 2		Average 1-1.5hours	Average total hours 3
School visit 1		Average 1-1.5hours	Average total hours 1.5
Walks 10		Average 2-2.5hours	Average total hours 25
Stalls 2		Average 3-4 hours	Average total hours 4
Hide openings 6		Average 2-3 hours	Average total hours 18
Facebook live 10		Average 30min -1hour	Average total hours 10

Approx. hours 61.5 +

We thank all those who give their time to enable the group to attend these events over the year. Without you this would not be possible.

## Thanks to our Supporters.

The Glens Red Squirrel Group wish to thank those groups and organisations who have worked with us and have supported the GRSG in our work over the last year. Forest Service Northern Ireland, National Trust, Heart of the Glens Landscape Partnership, North Antrim Community Network, Northern Ireland Squirrel Forum, The Wood Land Trust, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, Laragh Lodge Restaurant, Boyles Spar Ballycastle and Carnlough. Glenariff Improvement Group, Ulster Wildlife, NI Direct, Red Squirrel Survival Trust, William Hamill & Sons, Steels Feed Supplier and Ballyeamon Barn, Glens Garden Furniture, St. Ciaran's PS, St. Patrick's and St. Bridget's PS, Ballycastle integrated PS, and Cushendall RNLi.

The Group would also like to thank those dedicated members who carry out feeding, trapping, attending information stalls, walks, talks, tree planting and events that the group are asked to attend. Big thanks to those members who worked and are working hard dealing with grants and funding applications for the group. The work that the Glens Red Squirrel Group does, would not be possible if it was not for all the hard work of all these members

We as a group are indebted to the many households throughout the Glens that have Red Squirrel feeders in their gardens. These families maintain and fill the feeders at their own expense. They are our first line of defence, because if they should happen to have a visiting grey, they are on to us quicker than you can say "Glens Red Squirrel Group." We are updated continuously by these people as to what "their" red are doing. This frees up our many volunteers to do other Red Squirrel conservation work as well as helping to reduce the groups feed bill.

We would also like to thank all those who made donations to the group over the last few years to help us over this stressful time. Due to the pandemic and its aftermath, we had not been able to gather resources from our usual means and so these donations are helping us through these lean times.