

Glens **Red Squirrel** Group Annual Report 2023/2024 Charity Number 102100



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GLENS RED SQUIRRELGROUP CHAIR'S REPORT

This year marks my last year as Chair of the GRSG. The last three years for me have been very enjoyable and busy with family, work and group activities that involved walks, talks and events across the Glens and further afield. I would have liked to have seen more of our GRSG members take part in some of these activities as a way of getting involved, seeing what we do on the ground and possibly start volunteering their time to help. This would really help in the Group's continuing work overall.

This has been a very quiet year for the GRSG, but this has not meant that our volunteers have not been busy with their work to help the Red Squirrels here in the Glens of Antrim.

This year we saw a new Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council's Biodiversity Officer, Lisa Russell; this should be good news for the CC&G council area. I was able to meet with Lisa and talk about the work we have been doing in the Glens over the last 16 years. She is keen to assist in any areas that she can.

This year we have had several new visitors to the Hide all having had a great experience when visiting it. Over recent months, with some very strong storms, we did see a large part of one of the beech trees come down in the Hide area. This, although sad to see, did add some different set ups for photographs and many of the regular photographers like it. Sadly, this tree was cut up and removed with other branches that were laid out for the purpose of photographing. The general area has been left in a mess unfortunately. I have talked to Katie English (landowner) and permission had been given for general storm damage work within the woodland but she was unaware that it was so near to the Hide and had been an actual beneficiary to the Hide. She has assured me that this will not happen again around the Hide without consultation with us first. We will have to try and tidy up the smaller branches that were of no use to those removing the wood; these could form part of the dead hedge that was meant to be installed as a project with the Landscape Partnership Project several years ago.

We had a very successful year on our walks with Red Squirrels being seen on most of them, to the enjoyment of all who took part. This shows the benefits of our work. Our Red Squirrels sightings are up in our areas of work within the Glens but our sightings in new areas within the Glens are down. I feel

this is due to lack of volunteers. The Glens in general have reds widespread throughout them now and this is fantastic as they will be moving out beyond the Glens.

We have got a few new volunteers this year who have taken on feeding in some of our historical sites, Glenmona and in our buffer zone, Clare Forest. This is great as it means more people keeping an eye on the health and wellbeing of our Reds.

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, 2023-2024

Grey Squirrel Control

This year there was a total of thirteen Greys dispatched, nine of these were from the Cargan area, carried out by our volunteer in that area. This a key area as it is preventing the movement of Greys into Glenariff, two were from Broughshane, yes, not the Glens but our volunteers assisted with trapping and dispatch on this site. We also removed two from just from outside Ballycastle.

This takes the number of dispatches to 653 from 2nd 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 in a known Red Squirrel area as this gives us a good indicator of Red Squirrel activity patterns, where ever they may be.

CEDaR

The information recorded is

Date

Grid Reference

Sex of Animal

Weight

Who Dispatched?

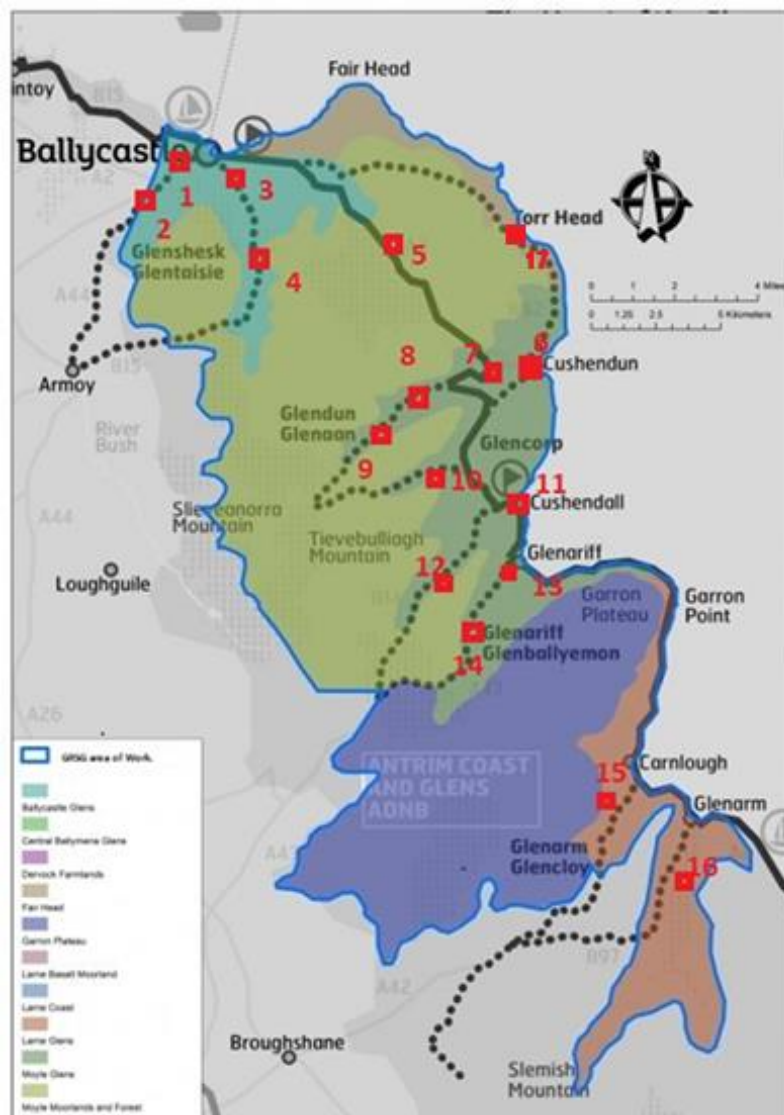
Date recorded to CEDaR

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 in/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/householders' gardens, who would report back to our Rangers if they see any grey activity taking place. We have other sites throughout the Glens that are privately maintained which we have limited input to, unless requested to be looked in on, if owners are away, etc.

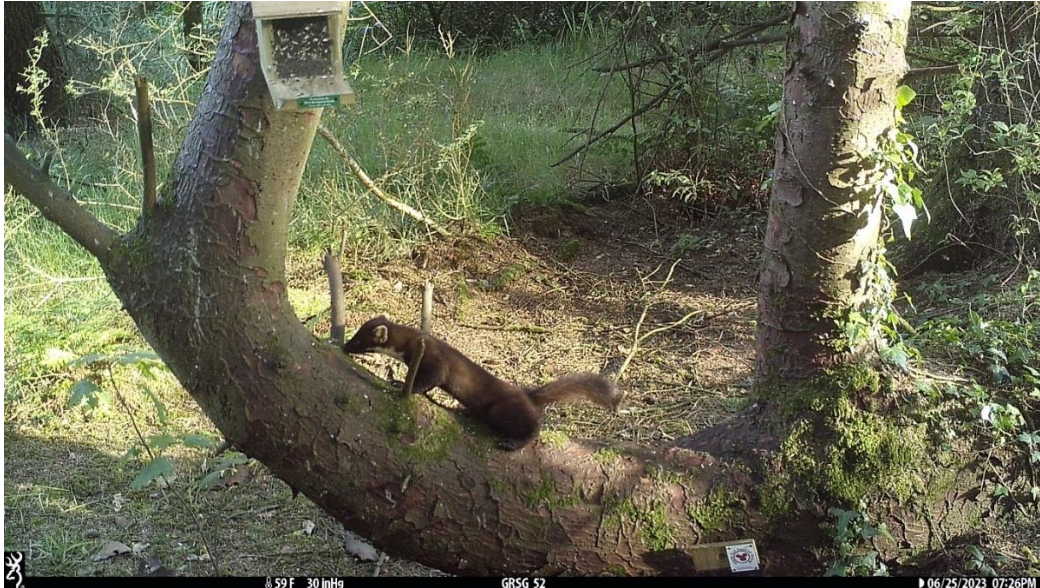
Active members' Report on their Feed / Monitoring Sites.

Clare Forest.

This is the first year that I have been feeding Red Squirrels in Clare Forest at a site off the Glenstaghey Road. There have been feeders in the past but on an old farmstead opposite the current location. I and others had reported sightings of Red Squirrels on the road (both alive and dead!). Apart from the Forest, Red Squirrels were sighted at the Glenmore caravan site (at the end of the Glenstaghey Road, at the junction with the A2 coast road on the way to Ballycastle). However, the site has been expanded in the past year, the Leylandii chopped back, and I have not seen any Red Squirrels on the road since – dead or alive! However, squirrels do not need to cross the road now for food.



Two feeders were set up, together with a camera in the early summer of 2023. From the camera footage, I could see that two Red Squirrels visit, often several times a day. There has in fact been a third squirrel but however, there were three squirrels around again in August. I have not seen any Grey Squirrels luckily. On several occasions, I have been able to wait quietly close by for about 30 minutes and watched the squirrels in action until they had finished feeding, which was quite magical.



With regard to other wildlife, I've also seen Magpies and other birds, a Badger, a Deer and a Pine Marten. Also a few curious humans!

Glenise Morgan, GRSG Volunteer.

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 ten Badgers living in it. This site was set up as a control site to impact on the number of Grey Squirrels that were making their way into Ballycastle Forest.

The Site has been very busy this year with five Reds being picked up on camera at one time. There is still a strong Badger population in the woods. The site has seen more people activity in it over the last year with a mountain bike trail being installed in it. It has not had a notable impact on the activity around the feed site.

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, this was one of three "Squirrel Trails" in the Glens alongside Ballypatrick and Glenariff. These all became part of "The Glens Squirrel Safaris."

Another fantastic year for the Reds and for the people who use the forest being able to see Reds. I have noticed that there has been a reduction in people using the forest in general. I know I have a set time I normally go up to sort the squirrels each week and it may be that there are fewer walkers through the day now. I also take any chance I have, to take a quick walk up and on these occasions, I am meeting less people. This may be just a phase and it will change and hopefully more people will start using the forest again. There are still several bikes using the trails. They are more aware than in the past few years and will now stop for a chat and let me know of any Reds they spot in the forest or at the feeders.



The Forest Service also did some work removing the bar in the low entrance gate; this was to let prams and push chairs in. This has made family walks a lot easier for us as we do not have to lift prams in and out. I have not seen too many other families on my walks. There was a fear that motor bikes may have started using this as an access but thankfully this has not happened.

Daniel McAfee, Chair and GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger.

Glenshesk/Carey.

I still maintain several monitoring and feeding stations within the greater Glenshesk and Carey areas. I do have the occasional Grey Squirrel that comes through my area, but thankfully the resident Pine Martins seem to remove them. Having said that, I have a particularly lucky grey at present in Glenshesk who is giving me the run around, only visiting every few weeks.

Gerard Mc Caughan, GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger.

The Curragh.

The Curragh is growing very well. Red Squirrels have been spotted in it, but as yet the only food available to them are the fruit trees and bushes. A few of the larger Scots Pines are starting to produce a few pine cones, but it will be a few years before they are in full production.

Gerard Mc Caughan, GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger.

Murlough Bay.

Mixed planting in small blocks of Oak, Ash, Holly, Beech, Larch, and Scots 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.

Over the last year, we did not pick up any squirrels on the cameras. There is still a large Deer population in the area; we didn't pick up the Pine Marten but from talking to local Deer stockers they have picked it up on their cameras. They also have not picked up any squirrels on any of their cameras. This year it will be part of the Ulster Wildlife survey and we might pick something up in May/June.

Daniel McAfee, Chair and GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger.

Torr Head.

The site near Torr Head is a small slip of trees less than three acres in size that stretch from the sea up to the cliff face. At its widest point it would be about thirty meters and at its thinnest point it would be four to seven 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 rainfall 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 coloured differences on camera, there are more than two. The site is quite difficult to get to and was serviced once a month. We have one Pine Marten which visits the site every four to five days. It does not really show much interest in the feeder, it seems to just visit the site when doing its rounds.

Daniel McAfee, Chair and GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger.

Glenmakeeran

Within Glenmakeeran there is a medium-sized copse of deciduous trees which fills the western side of the glen through which the Glenmakeeran River flows. The feeder is an area of exclusively Larch trees though there are other native species in the vicinity. There are regular but infrequent visits by Red Squirrels. Upriver of the site, the Glenmakeeran River extends into a part of Ballypatrick Forest where there is an extended area of native trees and where Red Squirrels are known to be present. A much more frequent visitor to the site is a Pine Marten (and of course Wood Mice). The Pine Marten is almost certainly a different animal to the one attending the Ballypatrick site as it took time for it to learn to operate the feeder while the Pine Marten in Ballypatrick was feeding easily. The Red Squirrels are not deterred by a Pine Marten having recently attended the feeder. Several local instances of Pine Marten Road kills and previous observations at Ballypatrick suggest that there is a healthy population of Pine Martens in the area.

John McGill, GRSG Volunteer.

Ballypatrick Forest.

Ballypatrick Forest was originally part of the first Squirrel Trail. The feeder site is in the vicinity of the forest and is surrounded by non-native spruce. There has been significant tree-felling in the area over the course of the last few years though despite the disturbance, the feeder is very frequently attended by a Pine Marten. There has never been a visit by a squirrel, Red or Grey. Due to the total absence of squirrels in the area I usually put meat or an egg out along with Sunflower Hearts and this keeps the Pine Marten's attention, including right through last summer. A Jay is another frequent visitor to the site for the stray seeds and there is a large population of Sika deer in the forest.

John McGill, GRSG Volunteer.

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.



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There are several monitoring sites within the wood. These are covered by cameras and are a mix of scatter feed and feeder sites.

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. The Great Spotted Woodpeckers are still coming to the Hide to use the feeders. This has been fantastic and offers professional photographers and hobbyists wanting to try and photograph them a great opportunity, The birds are very shy still and do not stay long at the feeder. Spring/summer of 2023 was the first time we had two male GSW in the woods drumming. This shows that the population is growing. We do know the pair in the woods have had young, but when they leave the nest, we lose track of them; hopefully they are moving out into the glen and further afield.



The red population has continued to thrive, numbers coming to the Hide are up, with seven having been seen at one time in the last few weeks. 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.

The wildlife 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 and several Badgers have been seen in the woods. This is great for the biodiversity within the area.

This year we did not have any young Pine Martens born. We did have at least three adults in the wood, one female and what looked like two males; one was a lot larger than the other. It was unfortunate that they did not have any young but hopefully this year they will do.

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. We did have one photographer raise an issue he had the last time he visited. On a previous visit he had six Reds around the Hide, but on this last visit he only had the one. It is just the luck of the draw.

As I have mentioned in the Chair's Report there was some storm damage and the area can do with a bit of a tidy up and new set up for photos.

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 have been, in the past, part of control programs. We have had no Greys in these sites. The reason for this may be because we have been very vocal about the illegal release of Greys that we suspected a few years ago. This has been fantastic news; it may also be because there are Pine Martens moving through many of these sites.

Daniel McAfee, Chair and GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger.

Glenmona Feed site and Playground.

In October a notice was sent round the Cushendun Swimming Group to see if anyone was interested in helping to fill the squirrel feeders in Glenmona House grounds at the sea front of Cushendun.

Having holidayed in the lovely village for many years and recently retired, I jumped to volunteer. I had been a member of the GRSG many years ago even though I was in Belfast living among the Greys! I loved to think that my little fee was of help and I read the emails that I got with enthusiasm.

I was happy to be invited to help and Gerard did a great enthusiastic introductory tour with me and armed me with feed.

My first foray was a cold Monday morning, armed with feed, measuring cup, hand gel, wipes and a sterilised litter tray scraper- I was determined that no viruses would be passed on by me! 30 minutes passed before the two feeders were emptied of husks and new seed added after a good scrape of the inside of the feeders. I needed a cup of tea after that! Luckily, I got much quicker over the weeks and so disturbance to the squirrel families is at a minimum.

I also realised that between my prolonged presence and my accompanying dog that I had spoilt my chances of actually seeing a squirrel. I am happy to tell you that they are still definitely there as all the seed is eaten every week. Other people who have seen me fill the feeders have given me stories of having seen squirrels playing on the tree ropes and at the feeders and thankfully they are all red!

I am still waiting for my first glimpse of a squirrel in Glenmona- as long as it is red!

Carole O'Hara, GRSG Volunteer.

Cushendall and Cottage Wood.

There are seven feeders in the Cottage Wood and all are being used; whilst the Reds are not always there in numbers; it is usual to see a Red when topping up the feeders. All the old feeders that were replaced were repaired and given to interested families and the feedback from them is that they are all having Red Squirrels attending their feeders. Those families are in Layde, Gaults Road, Glen Road Glenariff and on the Shore Road in Cushendall.

Laurence McAlister, GRSG Volunteer.

Laragh Lodge and lower Glenariff Forest Park

There are now eight feeders at the Laragh Lodge end of Glenariff Forest Park. All these feed stations are busy and very well attended. Most mornings, when topping up the feeders, Red Squirrels are visible with six being the most at any one time. The public are delighted whenever they see Red Squirrels and the squirrels have got used to the public's coming and going and generally continue feeding when people are about.

Laurence Mc Alister, GRSG Volunteer.

Glenariff and Parkmore Forest Park

There are eleven feeders in and around the upper part of the Forest Park which I regularly monitor and maintain. In Glenariff Forest Park there are a healthy number of Reds which visit the feeders regular.



And the Perspex feeders that were introduced last year seen to be a hit with the Squirrels and photographers.

Thankfully no Greys have been sighted within the forest for a few years.



Grace and Molly who regularly help with filling the feeders in the Forest Park.

Paul McHugh, GRSG Volunteer.

Martinstown and Glenravel.

In Cargan and Martinstown area unfortunately, sightings of Greys have been increasing regardless of my best efforts to keep them under control. This area requires a lot of work and I could do with a few extra volunteers to help control this problem.

We had a Red Squirrel sighted a few times at Ben's Wood late last year, hopefully it is still in the area.

Broughshane Wildfowl Park had a problem with Greys regularly visiting their Duck and Hen ground feeders. I was contacted over the Christmas period for help in removing them and thankfully was able to eliminate the problem.

Paul McHugh, GRSG Volunteer.

Carnalbanagh/Slemish area.

There have been no Red Squirrel sightings in the Carnalbanagh/Slemish area, despite it having suitable habitat and adjoining the Glenarm Forest where Red Squirrels are frequently spotted.

There are however periodic sightings of Grey Squirrels in the area and in the past two years approximately eight have been trapped and dispatched in two locations near Slemish. Grey Squirrel captures and sightings of their direction of travel suggest that the Slemish/Carnalbanagh area is an active corridor for the expansion of the resident Grey Squirrel populations of Broughshane and Ballymena into Red Squirrel strongholds in the Glens. Continued trapping and dispatching of Grey Squirrel in the Slemish/Carnalbanagh area remains an important measure to conserve the Glens' Red Squirrel populations, particularly in the Glenarm area.

Philip Applenton, GRSG Volunteer.

Carnlough.

I currently have eight sites in the Waterfall Rd. & Gortin Quarry/Woods area. Volunteers look after about twelve feeder boxes in various locations in the Glen and wider Carnlough area. I am pleased to report that sightings of Red Squirrels have become more numerous over the past year, especially in and around the homes on the fringe of the village.

Retired Minister, the Rev. Henry Kees and Eamon Mc Cormick seem to have adopted Straidkelly Wood and have feeders placed in various sites in the wood. Unfortunately, following someone having an accident and falling, the council have now closed off some of the paths to the woods thus restricting our access. Activity at feeder boxes was very quite last summer and autumn as usual but, since Christmas, activity has increased as natural food has got scarcer. No Greys have been reported in the area in the past year though a dead Grey was seen near Drumnasole on the Shore Rd (road kill). Unfortunately, one Red was also killed on the Straidkelly Rd. last summer (road kill).

There have been a few reports of Pine Martin sightings in the area between Glenarm and Carnlough last Autumn.



My Grandson, Ben (5) is a willing assistant in all my endeavours and perhaps a future Ranger? Style kindly installed by the council to make entry to Curragh Wood more accessible.

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) and 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 quiet as far as trapping is concerned. I was called out to investigate a sighting on Moyarget of a Grey that had been visiting a feeder for a week and the next day removed two male Greys. The landowner was keen to see how we did our dispatch and was very shocked that there had been two Greys and was impressed at the speed the Greys were trapped and dispatched. Over recent weeks I have had people asking about having Greys removed from their gardens near Bushmills.

Feeding and monitoring still takes place on all my sites and this year I did not pick up any Grey Squirrels.

I had a meeting with Forestry Service with regards to how we carry out Grey Squirrel control on their grounds.

Over the year I was able to get out and about with presentations and talks. So, it was good to get back out to groups and schools across Squirreltober and a few invited talks.

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 will not 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 quiet year so far and I have been mainly occupied with making, maintaining & repairing feeder boxes. Hedge cutting in recent weeks has disturbed some of my feeding sites so some feeder boxes have had to be moved; hopefully things will settle back to normal soon. The annual GRSG Quiz was well supported and all present enjoyed the evenings fun.

Gabriel McAuley, Deputy Chair and GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger.

Gerard Mc Caughan's Report.

A quiet year as far as I was concerned; I recruited a few more volunteers to help with the feeding and monitoring within The Glens, supplying them with the necessary equipment. Paperwork seems to take up more and more of my time with very little practical work to show for the time spent, but as we all know, keeping the paperwork up to date is a major task in any organisation.

Gerard Mc Caughan, GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger.

Equipment Report.

There was no Micro Grant this year, due to the political situation in Northern Ireland. Now that things are working again, hopefully next year it will be available. At present we have sufficient equipment to supply all our volunteers. Certain equipment like cameras do need to be replaced as they especially have a limited life span, but at present that is not causing us any problems.

The yearly audit is getting harder to complete each year, mainly due to our volunteers having less time due to other commitments. This year I found it particularly difficult to complete due to slow response from some of our volunteers. I feel that we need more volunteers covering smaller areas and so needing less equipment, but that is a difficult ask. As we all know, finding people who have the time to volunteer is very difficult.

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

Squirreltober Report 2023.

6th October, GRSG Squirreltober Quiz.

A night of fun and laughter, all for a good cause. Quizmaster Gabriel McAuley, ably assisted by his wife Mary, provided us with many challenging questions. Team, John and Geraldine from Carnlough, raced ahead at the last round to win. A grand total of £110 was raised. We would like to thank Laragh Lodge for their support and allowing us the use of their restaurant, to those who provided prizes for the raffle and to all our local sponsors for prizes given on the night.

10th October, Cookstown Wildlife Trust talk

A bit of a drive but more than happy to talk to this large group, in all forty people including members of the Mid-Ulster group. Chair Daniel McAfee delivered a talk on Red Squirrels in NI and the work we do and have done here in the Glens. A very well received talk with much interest in the removal of Greys. Some had seen Reds but most outside of N. Ireland.

15th October, Cottage Wood Red Squirrel Safari walk

GRSG Ranger, Daniel, led this Red Squirrel Safari. It was a fantastic morning for it. We were lucky to see two very quick sightings of Red Squirrels as they ran through the trees tops on our walk. Lisa Russell, our new Biodiversity Officer for the Causeway Coast and Glens Council joined us for this walk. This was Lisa's first venture out with us on a Red Squirrel Safari.





21st October Glenariff Forest Wood Story Walk

Once again, the Glens Red Squirrel Group partnered with the Armstrong Storytelling Trust to deliver two storytelling walks during the 2024 Glens Storytelling Festival. One took place in Glenariff and the other at Cregagh Wood. Deputy Mayor of Causeway Coast and Glens Margaret Anne McKillop joined The Cregagh Wood Walk. Storyteller Janice Witherspoon shared tales while GRSG volunteers told participants about our Reds and the work of the group.

Two very pleasant mornings.



22nd Cregagh Wood Storytelling and Red Squirrel Safari

A great day on the Storytelling and Red Squirrel Safari. No squirrels were spotted but we had a combination of nature stories and facts about the wildlife that live in Cregagh and about the fairy that lives there too.





24th October, Ballycastle Integrated PS & St. Patrick's and St Brigid's PS Sheared walk.

This walk takes place as part of their sheared education and outdoor learning, this lets the two schools mix and facility the children to build friendships with children they don't know. This is the first walk they do in the woods before doing several other "follow on" walks with different themes such as Art and Maths. This walk gives them a general feel for the forest.

This year we had two primary 5 classes from St Patrick's & St Brigid's Primary School and one from Ballycastle Integrated PS, totalling 90 children and 8 adults. On the walk we covered Tree ID, Seed distribution (means and ways), food chains, food webs, some plant identification, safety in the forest and where we got the chance we did some bird identification also.

Woodland and Forestry, fall into topics that St. Patrick and St, Brigid's cover in class and the children had a very good knowledge of them. I was most impressed with their knowledge on seed distribution.

In all a very educational walk and as it was dry this did help. Sadly, no squirrels were seen on the walk.



29th October, Ballycastle Squirreltober Walk

Our Chair and Red Squirrel Ranger, Daniel led a walk in Ballycastle Forest which was well attended. It was a great morning for it with lots to see. We saw Bullfinch, Jay, Buzzard and lots of Rooks taking pine cones from the trees. The autumn colours were slowly making their way into the forest which added to the beauty of the walk. Unfortunately, no Reds were seen this time. With the abundance of wild food, the Reds are not interested in our feeders in Ballycastle now; as the cold weather creeps in, this will change.



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. To our GRSG volunteers who helped and keep feeders stocked over the year to support our Reds and to make sure that our visitors get the chance to see Red Squirrels. To Janice Witherspoon, The Storytelling Festival, 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, Laragh Lodge, The News Letter, Belfast Telegraph, The Ballymena/Coleraine/Ballycastle Chronicle, Ulster Wildlife, UK Squirrel Accord and other groups who helped us out during the months, 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.

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 (Clare Wood, Capecastle, Broughammon, Ballycastle, Coolaveely, 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 found was 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 forestries 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 their overall health. 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 properties 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 presence of Pine Martens does have a negative impact on Grey Squirrel behaviour and abundance in an area. The concentration of Pine Martens in Forest Service NI properties varies 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 is 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 have 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 sites 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.

Overall, we see this partnership going from strength to strength for the protection of Red Squirrels in “The Glens” 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 Forestry Service have let us know of new works in the forest and we were able to add more forests to our licences agreement and hope to start work in them soon.

Lately, we had meeting with Jim Marshall and a members of an external auditing team in Glenariff

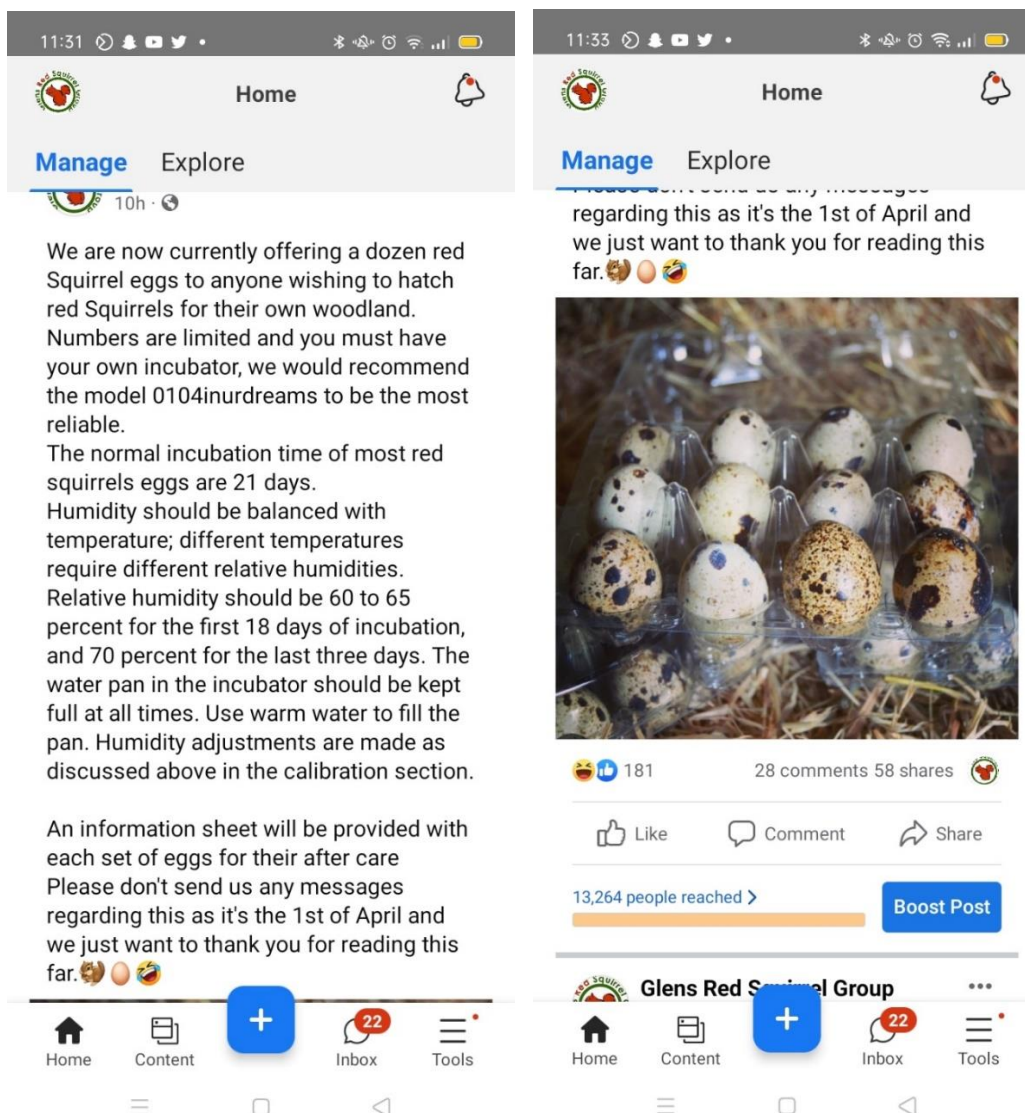
regarding our partnership and the way Grey Squirrel control and management is carried out by ourselves on Forestry Service ground. We were able to show that when trapping we follow good practice guidelines and explained what we, the group, expect from our volunteers when doing control. We were able to show and explain the methods of dispatch we use and the information we record and how it is used. While in Glenariff we took a walk around some of our feeders. During the quick walk round, we saw a total of six Red Squirrels at the feeders. In all a very productive meeting.

2023-24 Monthly Reports

April 2023.

1st April, Unprecedented Sale of GRSG Surplus.

The GRSG offered to sell off some of its surplus of “Red Squirrel eggs.”



The response to this advert was mind-boggling. Everyone had a good laugh once they realised the date!

1th April The Hide Open Day.



Taken by Jim Kerr



Taken by Jim Kerr

2nd April, Tree Planting

This is one of our many “Planning for the Future” Projects. We spent the Sunday planting trees beside the Ballyeamon Barn at the top of Glenariff. The GRSG had been asked to manage this ground for wildlife purposes by its owner Liz Weir. The trees were sourced by the GRSG and planted out. This type of management project has really taken off since the first area, “The Curragh” in Glenshesk was planted out in 2014.



8th April The Hide Open Day.



14th April, Cottage Wood Red Squirrel Safari.

Daniel, our Head Ranger, led this walk through the Cottage woods. We were lucky to see two very quick sightings of Red Squirrels as they ran through the tree tops during our walk. Lisa Russell, our new Biodiversity Officer for the Causeway Coast and Glens Council joined us for this walk.

15th April, The Hide Open Day.



22nd April The Hide Open Day.

27th April, Live from the Hide.

Live broadcast from the Hide in Cushendun to the Facebook page.

29th April, The Hide Open Day.



Taken by Peter Anderson

The Hide open days during the Month of April were and are continuing to be well supported. We are getting a lot of people who have never seen a Red Squirrel, never mind “up close,” visiting the Hide. Many of them make book the Hide for return visits, which is great to see.

29th April, Cushendun Big Arts Weekend

The GRSG attended the Cushendun Big Arts Weekend. We had an information table set up in Glenmona. Great interest was shown in what we do and how we are working to support the Red Squirrels in the area and throughout the Nine Glens of Antrim. Daniel and member, John McGill, manned the stall. A slow start to the morning but the weather was very poor. We had a few locals who were very happy to share their stories of Reds that they see in the village and around Glenmona House

May 2023.

19th May, Woodpecker in Cregagh Woods.

One of our Rangers had topped up the various feeders that we have around the Hide in Cregagh Woods and was about to leave when this male Woodpecker showed up.





25th May, Ardwell Bay Beach, Stranraer, Scotland.

We got this e mail from Heidi Kirby. She had been out having a walk on the beach and found part of one of our feeders. We had a little vandalism at one time at a feeding site and we presumed that the feeder had been thrown into the river. Here is the proof.

Hi

Just a little bit of info for you. I found one of your small platforms with your information attached to it on Ardwell Bay Beach, Stranraer! It has travelled across the Irish Sea 🤔

We hope you have a lot of Red Squirrels 🐿

Best wishes

Heidi



25th Live from Hide.

Live broadcast from the Hide in Cushendun to the Facebook.

June 2023

6th June, Pine Martin Road Traffic Accident.

We got a report of a dead Pine Martin. This one is not far from one of the woodlands that we work in. We had picked her up on the trail cameras as she was a regular visitor to our feed site. It is very unfortunate and something we do not like to see.

12th June, Cora McGoldrick's Final Year Documentary.

Cora McGoldrick produced an environmental short documentary in her hometown of Ballycastle as part of her final year's media coursework. The filming took part in late February/early March. She covered food waste being taken to the newly formed Community Fridge who were offering good food out to the community rather than going to land fill. She was also keen to capture a local biodiversity aspect and she chose Red Squirrels and the work that is taking place in Ballycastle Forest. It was a cold morning the day of the filming and we were lucky to see three different Reds at two of the feeders in the forest.

12th June, 7th Ballymena Scout Group - All Saints

There were 10 teenagers and two Scout leaders. The combined knowledge of the group was saddening, even with simple things like tree and bird identification, and even basic Key Stage 3 science, such as food chains and webs, were a challenge for them. These kids were all very bright but there was definitely a gap in their knowledge of our natural environment and biodiversity. We feel that our education system is geared more to exam results, rather than general knowledge and the environment around us. The Scouts as an organization are trying to install environment knowledge into these young people, but they can only do so much.

We did have a good day and they did enjoy the walk. There were lots to see and they became interested as the walk went on and keen to ask questions about plants, trees and birds that we did see. We visited the Hide but unfortunately, we did not see any Red Squirrels on the walk.

It was a fantastic day for a walk amongst the trees. Unfortunately, no squirrels were seen but in the heat wave then, who would blame them!







13th June, 20-23 Ballycastle Golf Club.

The Golf Club in Ballycastle had an unexpected visitor to their course. This Red Squirrel, wandered about, possibly looking for a “Squirrel” (one for you golf fanatics).



July 2023.

8th July, Red Squirrel in a Wood burner Stove in Glenarm.

We got a report from Jim Caughey in Glenarm.

“We heard some scratching noises this evening in the wood burner and when I opened the door there was a Red Squirrel. It then disappeared up the flu but not far, it clearly cannot get back up the flu and I think I can see a bit of tail”.

Colin, our volunteer in the area, was quickly on the scene and removed the Red from the stove. This can be a tricky operation to carry out. Thick gloves are required as they will bite and scratch. If they should get into a room, they will also run amok as they can run up and down walls very quickly. If one should break the skin or bite you, you will need a tetanus injection, just for safety's sake.





28th July, Meeting with Ross McIlwrath Ulster Wildlife

Ross McIlwrath from Ulster Wildlife met up with Daniel to learn how our work here in the Glens of Antrim was going.

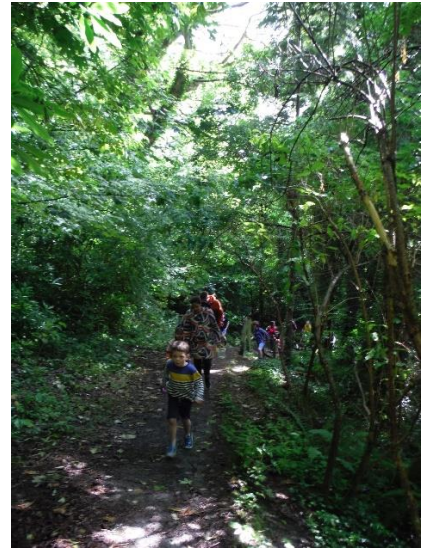


Daniel met Ross at the Hide in Cregagh Wood and they talked about the work the Group is currently doing. Ross was very impressed with all our achievements and hopes to return later.

August 2023

10th August, Cottage Wood Walk.

Our Family Nature walk led by GRSG Chair and Squirrel Ranger, Daniel McAfee in the Cottage Wood, Cushendall. This walk was linked with the Heart of the Glens festival. Eight adults and ten children attended on the morning. The walk started off dry but got very wet and muddy and ended in the heat of bright sunshine. We learned about the wildlife that call the Cottage Wood their home: from bats to birds and bees and squirrels. We did tree and plant identification and talked about the importance of our insects. We were also lucky enough to see a Red Squirrel at the feeder near the low gate. Everyone had a great time and all the children went home with a GRSG activity and an identification book to keep them busy in the wet weather and to help them look for wildlife in the good weather.





The remains of a Pine Cone picnic.



9th August, Lark in the Park, Cushendall

We set up our information table. As always, we were inundated with questions from both young and old about our work, Red Squirrels, Pine Martins and of course, Grey Squirrels.

October 2023.

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

October, Donation to the GRSG

In early July 2023 we received an email from the Charities Aid Foundation, a charity that deals with donations to different charities. They informed us that a doner wished to donate to us. They were looking for some information. Once we verified who they were, we provided them with what they wanted.

About 2 weeks earlier we had an email from a person who was donating £1,000,000, yes one million pounds, upon receipt of our bank details. Needless to say, we filed this request away in the circular filling cabinet. This first email gave the committee a chance to come up with some outrageous projects; a million is hard to spend. We all enjoyed the moment's fun!

In early October we received a donation via the Charities Aid Foundation. This was gratefully accepted, and it will go towards our work here in The Glens of Antrim.

To the person who made the donation, a very big heartfelt **THANK YOU** for your generosity.

2nd October, Dead Red found in Glenariff.



GRSG Volunteer, Paul was doing his weekly rounds in Glenariff Forest Park and came upon a sad sight, a dead Red in a feeder. On close examination it was a young squirrel and was in a very thin condition; its eyes and paws were clean, with no sign of infection. It was determined that the squirrel had died of natural causes.

26th October, Heritage 4 Health talk, in Old Church Cushendun.



Heritage 4 Health

Chair, Daniel McAfee gave a talk on the work we do here in The Glens helping our Reds which are very much part of our environmental heritage. Our environment heritage in The Glens is one of the least covered aspects when it comes to Heritage and this was a great way to link it in.



Thanks for the invite and fantastic work by the Northern Area Community Network

December 2023.

13th December, Live on Facebook at the LOG in Ballycastle Forest.

We had 27 people join the live stream on Facebook. It was a slow start as it had just been raining. We had a mix of small bird, a Robin, 5-6 Blue Tits, 8-10 Great Tits and 15+ Coal Tits. Sadly, no reds visited on this morning and when we had finished the Jay decided to show.

January 2024.

25th January, why did the squirrel cross the bridge?



Well, in Cushendun village it is the dryer option! Thanks to Seana for this photo of a Red Squirrel rocketing across the bridge in Cushendun.

February 2024.

4th February, Walk in Cushendall for Cushendall Development Group

A damp morning for the walk but a good turnout of people. The walk was led by our Chair, Daniel McAfee. The route followed was along the Riverside Walk and through the Cottage Wood. We covered plant and tree identification with Japanese Knotweed being a big problem along the river; many in the group were unaware of the issues it causes, and can cause. We were able to do some bird identification in the Cottage Wood and covered what steps you can take at home to help the wildlife in your garden. All had a very enjoyable morning.

8th February, Meeting with NI Forestry Service.

We had meeting with Jim Marshall and a members of an external auditing team in Glenariff regarding our partnership and the way Grey Squirrel control and management is carried out by ourselves on Forestry Service ground. We were able to show that when trapping we follow good practice guidelines and explained what we, the group, expect from our volunteers when doing control. We were able to show and explain the methods of dispatch we use and the information we record and how it is used. While in Glenariff we took a walk around some of our feeders. During the quick walk round, we saw a total of six Red Squirrels at the feeders. In all a very productive meeting.

11th February, The Volunteers fighting to conserve N. Ireland's Wildlife

BBC News published "The Volunteers fighting to conserve N. Ireland's wildlife" by Niall Glynn. This article included groups such as the NI Raptor Group, NI Badger Group and Glens Red Squirrel Group, all home-grown grass roots, small conservation groups who are working hard to help our local wildlife, some of the aspects of our work and what we face when doing our volunteer work.

The Volunteers Fighting to Conserve NI's Wildlife

By Niall Glynn
BBC News NI

Restoring Red Squirrel Numbers. *While Grey Squirrels are becoming an ever more common sight in Northern Ireland, the same cannot be said for the Red Squirrel. Several groups have been established across Northern Ireland to try to do something about this.*



IMAGE SOURCE, DANIEL MCAFEE

The Glens Red Squirrel Group says it is seeing an increase in the population of the animals in its area. Daniel McAfee is from the Glens Red Squirrel Group based in the Glens of Antrim since 2008.

"We were the second Red Squirrel group in Northern Ireland, now there are 14," he said.

"Part of the work that our volunteers do is going out into the woodlands, setting up feeders, putting cameras up so that we can see what's coming, whether it's Red Squirrels, Grey Squirrels or Pine Martins.

"We do a lot of educational visits with schools, walks and talks with anybody that'll really listen to us to highlight and promote Red Squirrels, our natural environment and local biodiversity."

The volunteers have also planted trees - with landowners' permission - on sites such as a two-acre field in Glenshesk.

"That's thinking for the future. It's all right us feeding the squirrels, but they're going to need to have the habitat that will sustain them in another 10, 20, 30 years," Mr McAfee said.

Another difficult part of the group's work involves the removal and culling of Grey Squirrels, which can starve out Reds from an area and also spread disease to them.

As Greys are an invasive species, it is illegal to release them after they have been trapped. Since 2011 the group has removed about 600 Grey Squirrels from the area they cover.

County Fermanagh is now regarded as Grey Squirrel-free after the Pine Marten was restored in the area.



IMAGE SOURCE, DANIEL MCAFEE

The group offers woodland walks where the Red Squirrels can be spotted.

Mr McAfee said the group's efforts are producing results.

"We're seeing populations of Reds that we hadn't got before and we're seeing the Reds that are in The Glens actually expanding and moving out into new areas," he said.

The groups say they are filling a gap in Northern Ireland conservation by concentrating on smaller localised areas.

While Grey Squirrels are becoming an ever more common sight in Northern Ireland, the same cannot be said for the Red Squirrel.

A growing number of groups have been established across Northern Ireland to try to do something about this.

A Big thanks to Niall Glynn for getting in touch with us.

24th February, BASC Glenwherry Trap Training.



As part of the NI Game Keepers course, we had been asked in early 2023 would we assist in delivering a Grey Squirrel Trap Training Day. Part class, part practical training day. The course normally touches on Grey Squirrel trapping as a part of the course, but they asked the GRSG to deliver a more in-depth look at trapping as part of an overall conservation effort and not just as part of a Gamekeepers management.



The day covered Red Squirrel and Grey Squirrel in N. Ireland, their impact on each other and woodlands, the Law / Wildlife act, Camera Traps, Squirrel groups in NI and the value of feeding information to these group to inform them of any control they may be doing, NISF trapping good practice and dispatch. We did not cover shooting as this is a method we the GRSG don't carry out, but this did let me ask them some questions on matters around shooting that were very interesting.



Everyone got to handle and try out cage traps. All but one had done some kind of Grey Squirrel control the man who was from Fermanagh and he had never actually seen a Grey Squirrel in his life in Fermanagh. Over all a good day and everyone went home having learned something on the day.

29th February, Talk to Portstewart Gardening Club

This talk was booked in early 2023 and was the second time we have given a talk to this group; the first time was 8-9 years ago. I was great to be asked back and to see them again. There were some very keen members interested in how to get rid of Grey Squirrels from their gardens. Many had visited some of our sites to see reds after my last visit and a few had attended walks I had have taken and thankfully we had seen reds on those walks which delighted them at the time, they were able to relive the sightings.



Mary Acheson, Mary Malvern and Helen Kirkpatrick, Portstewart Gardening Club

Reflection on our Work over the Years from 2015/2016 to 2023/2024

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 2024. 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

Approx. Total 141.5h

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

Approx. 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

Approx. 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

Approx. Total 40 hours

2020-2021

Walks	5	Average 2-2.5 hours	Average total hours 12.5h
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Approx. Total 12 hours

2021-2022

Talks	2	Average 1-1.5 hours	Average total hours 3
Walks	6	Average 2-2.5 hours	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 1 hour	Average total hours 1
Car boot sale	7	Average 3-4 hours	Average total hours 25

Approx. Total 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 - 1 hour	Average total hours 10

Approx. Total hours 61

2023-2024

Talks	5	Average 1-1.5 h	Average total hours 7.5
Walks	8	Average 2-2.5 h	Average total hours 14
Stalls	1	Average 3-4 h	Average total hours 4
Hide opening	5	Average 2-3 h	Average total hours 15
Facebook live	3	Average 0.5-1h	Average total hours 3
Meetings	5	Average 1.5-2h	Average total hours 10

Approx. Total hours 53

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. Forestry Service Northern Ireland, National Trust, Heart of the Glens Landscape Partnership, North Antrim Community Network, Northern Ireland Squirrel Forum, The Woodland 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, Ballyeamon Barn, St. Ciaran's PS, St. Patrick's and St. Bridget's PS, Ballycastle Integrated PS, Cushendun Big Arts Committee, Lark in the Park, Cushendall Development Group Heart of the Glens Festival Committee, Janice Witherspoon, Armstrong Storytelling Trust, Heritage 4 Health, Niall Glynn BBC News NI, BASC, LOVE Ballymena Facebook and other pages for sharing our posts.

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 were 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" Reds are doing. This frees up our many volunteers to do other Red Squirrel conservation work as well as helping to reduce the Group's 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 have not been able to gather resources from our usual means and so these donations are helping us through these lean times