

Tayside Red Squirrel Forum

Minutes of meeting held on 9th December 2008

Present : Mike Strachan, Mel Tonkin, Jeannie Grant, Graham Christer, Fred Conacher, Rob Coope, Johanna Willi, Simon poots, Ken Neil, Kathryn Howlett.

Apologies: Polly Freeman, Colin Castle, Brian Tasker, Kate Baird, Alison Anderson, Catherine Lloyd.

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels

Mel Tonkin distributed a document describing the next stage of the national project, Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels. She and others had met with Minister for Environment, Mike Russell at Banchory earlier this week to brief him on the Project. The press had covered this as a story. However, the intention is to launch this phase officially in February.

Tayside Squirrel Strategy

The latest draft of the Tayside Squirrel Strategy was distributed by Ken Neil. Once it is agreed, there is a question of who should take ownership. It was suggested that Tayside Biodiversity Partnership (alone or possibly with SNH locally) might publish it. The opinions of Catherine Lloyd and Colin Castle will be sought on this.

Mel stated that Forestry Commission is seeking to define quite clear lines on the map within which grey control will be carried out. The SNH national strategy concentrates on North Angus and Perthshire north of Dunkeld. However, the Tayside Strategy might allow for a degree of flexibility across the wider region. There is a problem that there is no promise of money for grey control in the national forest estate. Rob Coope explained that he had been told categorically that such money is just not available. The question was asked whether or not Forestry Commission would consider grey control efforts on its land if such assistance was offered by neighbouring estates. Fred Conacher wondered if there was anything to be gained in making approaches to local MSPs. Mel expressed concern that the ultimate intention of SNH and FC at national level is to concentrate what resources there are on developing the proposed strongholds. It was agreed that at this time we should really be looking at how to carry out grey control across as much of Scotland as possible.

In terms of supporting the Tayside Strategy, Mike pointed out that Dundee Single Outcome Agreement contains biodiversity aims that would include maintaining red squirrel populations.

(AP Ken will distribute electronic copies of this draft. Members are invited to respond with their final comments as soon as possible)

Scottish Rural Development Programme

Ken has been consulting case officers and agents to determine how to submit useful and effective SRDP applications for grey control in Tayside. He is keen to hear suggestions of contacts who might be interested in building grey control into their overall plans. He hopes that he might be able to act as an advisor to those who wish to apply for funding. It is hoped that there will be some grey control applications ready to submit to the second RPAC (Regional Project Assessment Committee) of 2009. Mike wondered if applicants would need to have a full forest plan in place to be eligible (to be clarified). (AP Ken will send out an e-mail requesting contacts)

Red Squirrels and Tourism

Kathryn Howell (Tourism Development Officer PKC) explained that European Regional Development Funding had been won to support and promote tourism initiatives in Tayside. The tourism project runs for two years and the outcome will be a number of new tourist draws. Within the four categories devised by the project set up to do this is that of Freedom Tourism. This will include the creation of plans that encourage the enjoyment of wildlife watching. Red squirrels seem like good candidates for building a tourism initiative upon. She invited the Forum to consider what might be done in this respect. One notion might be to devise a publication that brings together the locations where reds may be spotted to devise a recognised "red squirrel trail". Tourists would be encouraged to visit any of a number of places (Loch of the Lowes, Atholl Estates etc.) that joined in the marketing of the trail. The Forum is invited to consider what it might propose and Kathryn will send out a copy of the funding application form to Ken when it becomes available.

Group Updates

Johanna Willi introduced herself as the new Fife RSPO. She has a 12 month contract as part of a 3 year project run by the Fife Coast and Countryside Trust. She will work initially in two areas; Ladybank and Devilla and their surrounding communities. The plan is to develop a volunteer base as well as trails and educational facilities. There are hopes that more funding will become available to develop two more woods; Falkland and Pitmedden. It was suggested that something might be forthcoming from SITA for this.

Graham Christer has been encouraging Angus Group members to go out and visit some outlying woodlands in Angus to report on sightings there. Some have been responding and he is collecting data. He also visited Stracathro Hospital to set up a feeder and talk to residents.

Jeannie Grant said that schoolchildren in Crieff had asked through local councillors what is being done to save their red squirrels. She has responded. Also she pointed out the plans for development at Strathtay are causing considerable concern among the local community. She mentioned that Auchterarder Golf Course has been petitioning Perth Council for permission to build a rope bridge. Another golf course at Aberfeldy has plans to provide supplementary feeding and plant red friendly trees. (Ken mentioned that yet another golf course at Tayport is looking for assistance in developing its red friendliness).

Simon Poots spoke of a new trust that has been set up by Prince Charles (The Red Squirrel Survival Trust) This will be launched in the new year. He also mentioned that he had visited Ayton Hill Forest in Fife and was delighted to see several red squirrels. It appears that this 76Ha wood is up for sale and he has spoken to the Woodland Trust about the potential to take it over. They will check it out. He also asked if it would be a practical consideration for FC.

Polly Freeman reported by e-mail: She has been working on plans for 2009 and has in mind a range of walks, a children's event and feeder building workshops. She is also hoping to work with the estate's survey transect data and devise a figure that will represent a useful picture of the red population there.

DONM: Wednesday 4th March.

