

3.2 Woodlands for Red Squirrel

In addition to High Focus Wet and Upland Oak Woodlands, other woodlands in the Biosphere are significant habitats for the High Focus Species red squirrel and black grouse. These include various broadleaved and coniferous woodland. Of the wide range of woodland utilised by red squirrels upland mixed ash wood and lowland mixed deciduous woodland are UK Biodiversity Action Plan habitats.

Further information on the ecology and status of red squirrel in the Biosphere is given in Section 4.5.

3.2.1 Habitat Description

Any woodland type can be suitable for red squirrels, but in areas with grey squirrels, the mix of tree species can influence the balance of competition between the species. Broadleaved woodland containing trees that produce small seed species such as birch, rowan, willow, alder and ash are more likely to support red squirrels because grey squirrels prefer larger seeds from broadleaf trees such as sycamore oak, beech, chestnut and hazel. Red squirrel populations depend on having a sufficient area of wooded habitat, which continuously provide seeds and nuts to support populations in the long-term. Conifer woodlands within the Biosphere provide a large area of suitable habitat for red squirrels where they have the competitive advantage over greys. Priority woodlands for red squirrels and grey squirrel control are shown in Map 9.

3.2.2 Conservation Objectives

The main conservation objectives for woodland for red squirrels are to:

- Maintain and enhance areas of woodland that can support red squirrel through good forest management.
- To defend priority populations from the threats of replacement by grey squirrels from disease and competition.

3.2.3 Management

Sympathetic woodland creation and woodland management is important to ensure red squirrels are preferentially encouraged over grey squirrels with management specific to woodland type. Where considering changes to existing forestry or creating new forestry, it is recommended that advice is sought from Savings Scotland's Red Squirrel Project⁸ and Forestry Commission Scotland as felling licences may be required.

3.2.3.1 Woodland Creation to Encourage Red Squirrels

- New planting should strive to link existing woodland suitable for red squirrel.

⁸ <http://scottishsquirrels.org.uk/>

- Species preferred by grey squirrels, such as oak, beech, chestnuts and hazel, should not be planted in areas where these species are scarce as this could encourage greys into new areas.
- Planting trees favoured by red squirrels such as: blackthorn, hawthorn, wild cherry, yew, larches, douglas fir, Norway spruce and Scots pine⁹.
- Seed production can be encouraged by selecting south-facing aspects and long south-facing edges to east/west rides.
- Planting irregular shapes is important to increase woodland periphery.

3.2.3.2 Coniferous Plantation Planting and Management

- Where possible include heavy coning and fruiting species: Scots pine, larch, Norway spruce, lodgepole pine, firs, either within the coup or along the edges and by rides.
- Where possible include the following to discourage greys: birch, rowan, ash, willow, aspen and alder.
- Tailor thinning to increase seed production and create a more continuous supply by maintaining a proportion of older trees of various species to provide year round food supply.
- When harvesting leave blocks linking to other coups as habitat networks are important
- Use suitable species to link habitats such as riparian areas and rides with the forest
- Consider alternative silvicultural systems to clearfelling where aspect, soils and exposure allow.

3.2.3.3 Broadleaf Woodland Management

- Oak, beech, chestnuts and hazel should not be planted in areas where red squirrels are being encouraged and if they are present and a deterrent to greys is required, consider removal. Trees over 30 years should be removed first as these are the heaviest producers. This must be carefully considered as loss of these species can be detrimental to native woodland.
- For all woodland types establish a monitoring system and a review process.
- Management should aim to create uneven-aged woodland to ensure a constant supply of seed-producing trees.

3.2.4 Example Projects

- For red squirrel project details see Section 4.5.6

⁹ For a comprehensive list of trees and shrubs which are good for red squirrels visit the Red Squirrels in South Scotland website at <http://www.red-squirrels.org.uk/shrub.asp>

3.2.5 Considerations

- Potential conflict with native broadleaved woodland management and establishment needs to be resolved on a site by site basis.
- Woodland creation must not facilitate grey dispersal from Ayrshire and Cumbria into the Biosphere.
- For new woodland identify the most appropriate type of planting for the site through consultation with Forestry Commission Scotland, identifying other nearby woodland types, species present in the area and in nearby/linked woodlands.

3.2.6 Opportunities

- Funding available under Forestry grant schemes for forest management, woodland creation, restructuring etc.

3.2.7 Further Information

Action for red squirrels by Forestry Commission Scotland (2008):

<http://scotland.forestry.gov.uk/supporting/strategy-policy-guidance/biodiversity/species-action-notes>

Scottish Strategy for Red Squirrel Conservation (June 2015):

<http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/A1465416.pdf>

A range of informative leaflets and policy guidelines are available from Forestry Commission Scotland at: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/infd-8c8bs6>