

BIODIVERSITY

Communications Toolkit

Red Squirrel Project

Lead and main partner organisations

- Sustain Dundee
- Dundee City Council
- Sustain Dundee Red Squirrel Project

Aims and objectives

- To protect and enhance the population of red squirrels in Dundee
- To raise awareness and promote education in the community of the conservation of the red squirrel and its associated habitats

Target audience

- Local people living in Dundee
- Businesses and other organisations based in Dundee

Background

Sustain Dundee Red Squirrel Project was initiated in 2002. A working group was set up involving a number of groups, including Scottish Natural Heritage, The Woodland Trust, Dundee City Council, and Sustain Dundee. The project also engages with a number of partners who deliver the project's objectives on the ground, through land management and survey work. These include NHS, local Enterprise Company, local Golf Courses, householders, developers and a dedicated volunteer group.

Sustain Dundee, an environmental charity, secured funding, including a grant from Tayside Biodiversity Action Fund (TBAF), to support the project. The project has worked hard to win funds to pay for a dedicated Red Squirrel Project Officer for six months of the year and a number of organisations have generously offered in-kind support. In addition, a Breathing Places grant was used to support a publicity and public information campaign.

Format of communications

- Information pack for householders
- Volunteer group recruitment
- School education pack
- Public information display
- DVD
- Website

Summary of activity

Due to the sensitive nature of positive red squirrel conservation and the consequent control of grey squirrels, it was important to manage public perception. Therefore, a lot of effort has been invested in communicating positive messages about red squirrels through a variety of techniques.

The project has formed a good relationship with the local media to help them communicate the difficult message of controlling grey squirrels to help protect reds. The local media is very supportive and uses information about the project fairly.

A number of other awareness-raising initiatives have been possible with the help of a grant from the Breathing Places / BIG Lottery fund, including:

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- **Householder Pack**

'Meet the Neighbours' is a two-phase communication that targets residential areas that have red squirrels. Phase one: over 2,000 freepost cards were delivered to local addresses, offering a brief outline of the aims of the project and the issue of grey squirrel control. Phase two: residents can return the postcard in exchange for a Householder Pack, which gives them more detail about red squirrel conservation. The cards generated a 15% response from households requesting a squirrel information pack. Freepost cards are distributed at shows and events. This enables the project to maintain a database of interested people and offers an additional way to communicate with them.

- **Action volunteers**

The project encourages interested individuals to become actively involved. A group of 30 dedicated volunteers from the Red Squirrel Action Group feed monitoring information into a national survey. This helps the project find out where best to direct their efforts into protecting red squirrels.

- **Education pack**

Working closely with the local education department, the project devised an education pack that is tailored to the curriculum. Red squirrel activities link into a number of subjects, including maths, english, geography and biology.

- **Display**

The project has a touring display that is exhibited at local venues. Recently, the project set up an initiative with local libraries in Dundee whereby red squirrel promotional displays will be placed near wildlife books for adults and children. A cartoonist from the local newspaper has developed a children's character – Rory McSquirrel – to illustrate the education pack and display.

- **DVD**

A short film has been developed to communicate the message in a fun way to a general family audience.

- **Website**

A dedicated website offers access to the Householder Pack and allows people to report sightings online. There are details of forthcoming events and a downloadable library of red squirrel images.

Outcomes

Funding has been secured to widen the project to a more regional context.

The involvement and commitment from a diverse range of organisations and individuals has been a major strength of the project. Many people in Dundee have been motivated to get involved in the project and have reported sightings, including local police officers, hospital staff and golfers.

Dundee is the only city in the UK with a stable population of reds. City sightings of red squirrels have increased and they have been spotted in areas where they have long been absent.

Due to the success of the project and the increase in sightings of red squirrels, the project has generated national news coverage on BBC Radio 4 and featured in a BBC documentary, 'The Nature of Britain', broadcast on 25 October 2007. In addition, a New York Times photographer, who contacted the project through its website, travelled to Dundee to take pictures of Scottish red squirrels.

Further information

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