

Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels



Building a red squirrel volunteer network
A guide for local community groups



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1. Introduction

Community action will be key to the long-term protection of Scotland's red squirrels. Preventing the spread of grey squirrels is an ongoing process that can't be achieved without time, resources, and landscape-scale collaboration. But it's worth the effort – in many priority areas, red squirrels are already making a comeback.

In 2017, the Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels (SSRS) project was awarded a £2.46 million National Lottery Heritage Fund grant to begin a new 5-year phase called 'Developing Community Action'. During this phase, the project aims to establish and support volunteer networks across South Scotland, where the need for community action is greatest. We're focussing on identified 'priority areas for red squirrel conservation' (PARCs), where our efforts stand the best chance of success.

This guide is designed to help groups and individuals looking to work with SSRS to develop a local red squirrel volunteer network.

Cross-border thinking

The 'volunteer network' model was inspired by projects south of the border, where local volunteer groups have been operating successfully for many years. Red Squirrels Northern England is supporting groups in Cumbria and Northumberland who are providing almost complete grey squirrel control coverage across the region. As a result, red squirrel populations in many parts of Northern England have now stabilised. We aim to create a similar network across the south of Scotland, with a focus on identified priority areas.

Become part of the movement

There are already many local volunteer groups operating across South Scotland, and some have been active for many years. These groups have been invaluable in our collective efforts to protect red squirrels in the region.

Volunteers make contributions at every level, from fundraising and public awareness to survey and monitoring to grey squirrel trapping and dispatch. By working together, we're ensuring that our efforts are coordinated.

SSRS is able to support groups by providing resources, training and expertise. As the network expands, volunteer groups are also supporting each other under the umbrella of the ['Red Squirrel Forum for South Scotland'](#).

2. Getting started

You've decided you want to form a red squirrel volunteer group. Where do you start?

Find enthusiastic people

You may already have a small group of interested people, perhaps through other community initiatives or after attending a SSRS event together. Or you may be a sole individual on a mission! Either way you'll want to gather together as many new members as possible to keep up momentum and ensure your actions can make a real difference.

Community events are often a good way to bring local red squirrel enthusiasts together, for example a talk from a SSRS Conservation Officer or a stall at a village fair.

Set up a meeting

Once you have a group of people assembled, the first thing to do is get together and start forming an action plan. To begin with, you'll need to make decisions such as:

- **Group name** – how do you want to be known?
- **Group boundary** – where will you operate?
- **Group mission** – what do you want to achieve? Consider the volunteering interests of group members, and the conservation need of your local area.

Your regional SSRS team can help set up this meeting and can advise on all the early decisions you'll need to make to get set up. Once the basics have been established, your group can be listed on the SSRS website and given its own page on the project's online [Community Hub](#).

To help build up your membership, it's a good idea to keep early meetings open to the public and advertise them locally. As the group develops you may decide to keep meetings open, or instead choose to recruit new members through other public engagement activities.

Items to discuss may include:

- What knowledge and skills does the group have? What's missing?
- Where are red and grey squirrels found in your area? Are there any places that need surveying?

Assign roles and tasks

During your early meetings you should begin to set some clear roles and tasks. Making sure everyone has something to do that suits their interests and abilities will keep the group motivated. Remember that everyone is volunteering their time! Set goals that are in line with the group's availability and other commitments. Roles include:

- Data volunteer
- On-call dispatcher
- Monitoring volunteer
- Events volunteer

Identify a coordinator(s)

While SSRS can provide support and guidance, groups often work best when one or more volunteers take on a leading role. To begin with, coordinators may help organise and chair meetings, manage communications, and administrate the group's page on the SSRS Community Hub. Often these people will emerge naturally as the group develops.

3. Getting organised

Group structure

There are two structures a group commonly use: unincorporated and incorporated. Most groups start off as unincorporated and later become incorporated in some way, depending on the group. It is important to note that a decision on group structure doesn't need to be made right away and often develops naturally over time. A table comparing these group structures is shown below:

Unincorporated	Incorporated
Does not (necessarily) have a Chair, Secretary & Treasurer	Has a minimum of a Chair, Secretary & Treasurer
Cannot have a bank account	Can have a bank account with minimum 2 signatures for withdrawals
Does not have a Constitution	Has a Constitution or at least a Terms of Reference
Must report to SSRS	Must report to SSRS as well as their Community Initiative, if applicable
Can apply for small local funds	Can apply for a wide range of funds
Cannot apply for charitable status	Can apply for charitable status

No matter the structure of the group, a Terms of Reference is a great way to pin down the aims of the group and look at how these aims might be achieved. This can later be developed into a Constitution. SSRS can provide examples to refer to and can help with this process.

How does group structure affect funding?

An unincorporated group does not have a Chair, Secretary, Treasurer or Constitution and so cannot have a group bank account. It is possible to apply for small, local funding, but this becomes much easier with some established volunteer roles in the group and a document stating the aims of the group – even if this is just a Terms of Reference.

There are two main options for an incorporated group to manage their funds:

- Funds are held in a group bank account, which requires at least two signatures for any withdrawals
- Funds are held by a local Community Initiative and are ring-fenced within that Initiative's bank account. The Initiative usually do the accounting and admin work and often request that groups report on their activities and withdraw their funds via expense claims. The group may need to abide by Initiative rules and there may be some restrictions on spending

In order to raise funds, groups can consider the following options:

- Applying for grants
- Partnering with local organisations
- Running local fundraising events
- Running a stall at a countryside event to raise awareness and donations

SSRS staff can offer advice and further information on fundraising options in your area.

4. SSRS financial support

Thanks to our funders, financial support is available until April 2022 to help local volunteer networks drive red squirrel conservation forward in South Scotland.

What support is available?

There are two streams of volunteer network support: start-up funding and maintenance funding. They are designed to help cover the following costs:

- Resources required for grey squirrel control, survey work and community engagement
- Volunteer travel expenses
- Costs for venue hire and organising red squirrel events and training workshops

Who is eligible?

Support is primarily available for volunteer network groups operating within PARCs. However, network groups operating outwith PARC boundaries may also be eligible for some support if sufficient criteria is met. Your local Conservation Officer can advise.

4. 1 Network start-up funding

Start-up funding is a one-off purchase that is designed to help new volunteer network groups kick-start their red squirrel conservation activities.

What's covered?

Resources required to carry out grey squirrel control, survey work and public engagement¹, for example traps, bait, Virkon and feeder boxes.

Who is eligible?

- Newly formed network groups operating within PARCs
- Newly formed network groups outwith PARCs, only when
 - The network meets the appropriate criteria
 - Sufficient funds are available

Any volunteer network group receiving support must abide by the **SSRS memorandum of understanding**, to be signed by their Group Coordinator.

How much support is available?

The amount of support will vary depending on the size of the network, the conservation need and eligibility, as well as available funds. Your local Conservation Officer will work with you to help determine what resources you require.

How is the support claimed?

- Network groups work with Conservation Officers to order resources from the **volunteer catalogue**. Make sure you have a suitable storage location for your equipment!
- Order forms are passed onto the SSRS Project Administrator. Once approved, items will be purchased in bulk and distributed
- No money changes hands

4.2 Network maintenance funding

Ongoing network support is available through annual maintenance funding, which is intended to help volunteers carry out their conservation activities and expand their network through public engagement and volunteer training.

¹ Public engagement equipment (e.g. marquees, display boards) is also available to borrow: ask your Conservation Officer for more information

What's covered?

- Resources required to carry out grey squirrel control, survey work and public engagement, for example traps, bait, Virkon and feeder boxes
- Volunteer travel expenses (see the **SSRS volunteer handbook** for guidelines)
- Events expenses (e.g. venue hire or engagement materials)

Who is eligible?

- Network groups operating within PARCs
- Network groups outwith PARCs, only when
 - The network meets the appropriate criteria
 - Sufficient funds are available

Any volunteer network group receiving support must abide by the **SSRS memorandum of understanding**, to be signed by their Group Coordinator.

How much support is available?

The amount of support will vary depending on the size of the network, the conservation need and eligibility. Please consult with your local Conservation Officer before making a claim.

How is the support claimed?

- Travel expenses are claimed through the Scottish Wildlife Trust **volunteer expenses form**, via your network's Group Coordinator. Travel is reimbursed at a rate of 35p/mile. Please note individuals claiming travel expenses must be registered Scottish Wildlife Trust volunteers.
- Events costs can be pre-arranged via the SSRS Project Administrator

5. The Community Hub

As part of the project's 'Developing Community Action' phase, the [Community Hub](#) was launched in 2018. The Hub is an online space for our supporters and volunteers to keep up to date with the project and connect with like-minded people working to protect local red squirrel populations. Registered users can keep track of their squirrel sightings, and volunteers can also access additional resources as well as submit and view data online.

Volunteer networks are provided with their own space on the Hub. This includes a listing in the [group directory](#), a public and members-only homepage with interactive mapping, and messaging and document sharing functionality.

SSRS can arrange workshops to help your members get registered and set up on their network's Hub page.

6. FAQs

What is a PARC?

PARCs are areas in the south of Scotland that have been identified as priority areas for red squirrel conservation. With such a large area to cover and limited project resources, prioritising some areas will ensure that as many of the region's healthiest red squirrel populations as possible are given the full protection they need. PARCs are chosen for a variety of reasons including viable red squirrel populations, a threat from grey squirrels and the potential to build strong community action. PARCs are reviewed periodically to ensure we are responsive to changing situations over time. You can view current PARC boundaries at scottishsquirrels.org.uk/network-directory/

Does my network need a bank account to receive support from SSRS?

No. The support package is designed to help volunteer networks participate without a bank account and the associated administrative commitments. Purchases of catalogue items, venue hire etc can be arranged via the Project Administrator. Travel expense claims are made by individuals and can therefore be reimbursed to the volunteer's personal bank account.

However, once fully established groups should consider setting up financial structures to ensure they can continue to operate beyond the duration of the SSRS project.

Can volunteer networks raise their own additional funds?

Yes! However please make sure it is clear to donors that funds are being spent locally and are not being donated to the national project. Networks should keep a detailed record of their expenditure and have a financial structure in place if they are receiving significant donations or grants. Please see the SSRS fundraising guide for more information.



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PROJECT PARTNERSHIP

FUNDERS



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