

Glens **Red** Squirrel Group

Annual Report 2020/21



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GRSG CHAIR'S REPORT



Liz Weir, Chair of "Glens Red Squirrel Group", 2017-2021

There can be little doubt that this has been the most difficult year in the history of the Glens Red Squirrel Group. Like everyone in Northern Ireland the members of the group have found ourselves trying to simply live through the horrors of the pandemic and to keep ourselves and our families safe.

Lockdown meant we were unable to carry out the normal work of the group or meet as a committee. Work in the forests was not possible and so our activities were curtailed. Our fundraising ventures ceased meaning our income was much reduced.

Communication has only been possible by email and phone but Gerard McCaughan did sterling work on funding applications and responding to queries and collating reports. Our Vice Chair Daniel McAfee regularly posted on the group's Facebook page to maintain public interest in the work of our organisation and to help create support for the preservation of our native Red Squirrels. Our Treasurer Tom Naughton processed membership fees and maintained our financial records.

As outgoing Chair I want to thank these office bearers for their continuous support. Other committee members have assisted in any way they could and I want to say a special word of thanks to Mrs Nuala Connolly who is retiring from the committee this year. She was a founder member of the group who has worked hard in many roles over the years whether in helping with memberships, manning information stands or representing the group at meetings. Years of dedicated service for which we are very grateful.

If the Glens Red Squirrel Group is to continue with its essential work in preserving the local native red squirrels we will need to recruit even more volunteers to help with feeding, grey squirrel control, and fund raising. The work is on-going and we can but hope that our future educational activities with schools and youth group people will result in attracting younger members of the public to assist us.

Grey Squirrel Control

Due to Covid 19 which has had an impact on our standard Grey Squirrel control we have been unable to train any new people.

From the start of our record keeping in 2-4-2011, we have logged 615 Grey Squirrels dispatched across the Glens with 25 being dispatched this year. We have picked up several greys across our historical trapping sites and this is one reason why we maintain these monitoring points throughout the Glens and at set key buffer zones. We have seen that in areas where we have Pine Martens that we are having less grey if any grey activity at all.

Over the last year our volunteers have looked into as many reports that we have received as best as we could with Covid 19. This has meant we could not look into them all due to restrictions. It is very easy to mistakenly identify the wrong colour when all you see is a flash of a tail, especially as a lot of our reds have a whitish tail. We ask people to send photos in on Facebook or email them to us if they are able to get a photo to try and help use confirm sightings.

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).

CEDaR

The information recorded is

Date

Grid Reference

Sex of animal

Weight

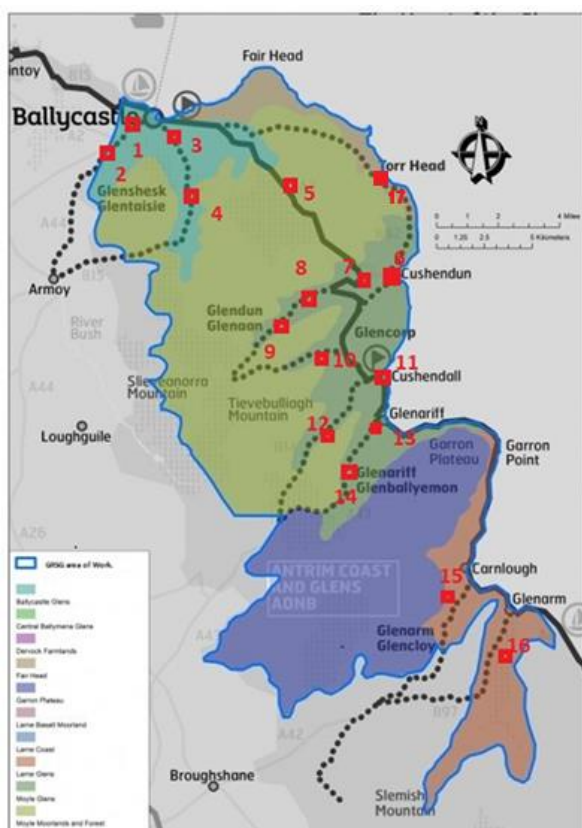
Who Dispatched

Date recorded to CEDaR

We ask the dispatcher to provide a photo and it is logged with the CEDaR report as proof. Each dispatch is given a GRSG number and logged to CEDaR with that number. If we do not get enough information we will log it on our GRSG records but may not be able to log it with CEDaR. We have been officially recording with CEDaR since 2014. The three key species we log are Red Squirrels (601), Grey Squirrels (318) and Pine Martins (37). We do find other animals on our trail cameras, but we only record these three, live sightings, RTA and dispatched greys. The number of reds recorded is not an accurate number as our Rangers and Volunteers do not record each and every sighting of a red that they have seen. Mainly because they are visiting the same sites regularly.

We only log our Grey Squirrel dispatches once a year now, as we found that we were having trap sites traced down within 3-7 days of the logging record so to prevent this, all records will be made once across all sites and with limited information given. We did mark them as sensitive but were advised not to as this can cause issues with mapping (Blocks out large areas).

General Report on Feed and Monitoring Sites.



Working areas.

Feed sites that are open to the public to view are:-

- 1 Ballycastle Forest
6 Glenamona Cushendun (Temporally shut down for ongoing control.)
7 Glegagh Wood (Temporally shut down for ongoing control.)
11 Cottage Wood Cushendall
14 Glenariff Forest
16 Glenarm Forest.
15 Carnlough.

Feed sites that are 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 location that Greys have been seen/ reported or a single animal has been removed in the past. Cameras can be set on feeders if needed. Some of these sites are within private land/ house holders, who would report back to group Rangers if see any grey activity takes 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 reports on their Feed / Monitoring Sites.

Hanging Wood

A mixture of Oak, Hazel, Ash and Holly with no Conifer trees. This 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 8 Badgers living in it. This site was set up as a control site to impact on the number of Greys Squirrels that were making their way into Ballycastle Forest. The site had a number of Greys when it was first set up and no Red Squirrels, after a number of Greys had been removed, a set of Red Squirrels were found to visit the feeder. Shortly after the Reds appeared a female Pine Marten was found to use the site and no Greys were seen, unfortunately the Pine Marten is not a regular visitor though it can come several times a year.

The Hanging Wood's reds this year were very active over the start of the year going by the camera that is in place. In December Red Squirrel activity dropped from daily visits to less than once a week for some unknown reason. In mid-January a pair of Grey Squirrels appeared and trapping took place with no success over the 2 weeks of trapping no squirrels were trapped at all. Over February Red Squirrel activity started to pick up. We also had a Pine Marten visit the site for a few nights over the end of February but it was not the usual Pine Marten that occasionally visits the site. This animal was bigger and we think it is the adult male from Ballycastle Forest.

Daniel McAfee, GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger and Vice Chair.

Ballycastle Forest

Ballycastle Forest is a mixture of mature conifer blocks and broad leaf planting, all between 15-20 years old. One of the first sites for a GRSG observation site in 2008 and with assistance from the CCGHT was one of 3 Squirrel Trails in the Glens alongside Ballypatrick and Glenariff. These all became part of the Glens Red Squirrel Safari Trails.

There are 8 feeders within the forest as part of the Squirrel Safari and they are well used and situated on the main Ballycastle Forest walk/ road way. This walk starts at the low entrance to Ballycastle Forest, part of the Ballycastle railway line and then round the forestry loop to the forestry yard and down what is known locally as Donnelly's Lane, back to the low entrance.

All the feeders are well used and well known by many of the walkers and users of the forest, who regularly inform us of reds they have seen and if there are any issues with the feeders, such as damage or lids that may have come off.

We have 1 fixed Trail Camera point in Ballycastle Forest. This is at the feeder on the big bend known to all the locals and walkers as the "Big Bend Feeder". It is in a stand of Larch. These Larch are all that remain of the original Ballycastle Forest, planting started in 1931. These Larch were planted in 1936. The reason this camera is fixed in this location is because it is the first location for any encroaching greys, when they come to the forestry.

This year has seen foot fall in Ballycastle boom. With Lockdowns, stay at home, work from home and the encouragement to get outdoors to exercise, has encouraged more people out into the forestry. Granted in the first Lockdown, all forestry's were shut or closed, as restrictions were eased people did start using the forestry more.

We had no greys recorded or reported at any of our feeders this year. We have had an increase of sighting but this is down to more people using the woods.

Thankfully there has been no issues with vandalism or damage with the increase of footfall to the forestry. We have actually found that there has been a positive factor of the increase of people. There are several people who now feed the birds on their walks of the woods, these people have set areas along the walkway that they put out small handfuls of seed. The birds in the area have become quite friendly, we have found that the reds have also been availing of this addition food source. There are several areas that squirrel sightings had increased that are not at squirrel feeders, such as the large stones at the entry of the forest, the fallen tree in the beach planting and the hazel layby. All of these

are areas where bird feed is scattered and people are getting to see Red Squirrels feed as well as the birds.

The reds have been all doing well and at the feeder at the

At one stage we began to have problems at the feeder at the big bend and we thought that there was someone tampering with the feeder. It was found to be on the ground each week, each time it was down I was being contacted to tell me it had fallen or was no longer on the tree. I then thought it must be the Pine Marten that had returned. But this was not the case, it was only on a day that I was going to fill the feeder that I saw that it was a red pulling the box off the peg. I happen to point this out to two passers-by who said they had seen this several times before and it was always around the end of the week when the box was low in food. This red didn't like it, when the box was near empty and found it easier to get food from the husks when they were on the ground.

Daniel McAfee, GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger and Vice Chair

Glenshesk

We had another successful year again. Over the last year, a few more people reported that they have Red Squirrels visiting their gardens and they are now feeding them with advice from the group. This is great because I have been able to remove one of my monitoring stations as the family close by, can now do the monitoring for any Grey Squirrel that comes to the area.

The resident Pine Martin pair had three young this year. Once they grew to a size that they could wander about, they visited my sites continuously, day and night, so I had to leave out feed for them specifically. Unfortunately one of the young disappeared in July 2020, but the two others are still about. Their parents will be hunting them soon from the area so that they can start a new family again this year. I did notice that when the young began to wander about, their parents started to hunt further afield and I picked them up on my trail cameras quite far from their nest site.

Gerard McCaughan, GRSG Ranger and Equipment Caretaker.

The Curragh

The trees in the Curragh are continuing to grow well. It may just be my imagination, but I feel that they did grow exceedingly well this year. In July we got a few fruit trees given to us. The Rowan and most of the soft fruit bushes produced fruit, but the birds enjoyed them before they became fully ripe. I continue to remove vegetation that is restricting the light getting to the smaller bushes and the replacement trees that were planted last winter. The bracken was growing very thick on this site before we cleared it originally and if given the chance will smother the smaller bushes.

Gerard McCaughan, GRSG Ranger and Equipment Caretaker.

Carey

There is not much to report regarding Carey. The Red Squirrels about Maghera Temple remain healthy and are growing in numbers. The pair that have moved up the Carey River towards Drumnakeel are still there and I am hopeful that they will have young this year.

We still get Grey Squirrels coming down through Glenmakeeran and on into Ballycastle. The monitoring sites that I have in Carey had quite a few greys visiting them over the year and all were removed. The local farmers also keep me informed as to any greys that they see.

Gerard McCaughan, GRSG Ranger and Equipment Caretaker.

Murlough Bay

Mixed planting in small blocks of Oak, Ash, Holly, Beech, Larch and Scot Pine, with large blocks of hazel as you move towards Fair Head, mostly along rock face and the steep slopes of the headlands.

This has been a monitoring site from 2016 when the first grey was seen and removed. Monitoring takes place every four months for 2-3 weeks with a camera and a feeder.

This site is one of the areas we normally do as part of the "Presents and Absence" survey over the last number of years. The site is rich with wildlife with a large number of Deer, a healthy Rabbit population and a number of Foxes.

Sadly this year we received information from one of the land owners a few days before Lockdown that he seen a couple (a man and a woman) in a car pull in, open their boot and release at least 4 grey squirrels. He was unable to get any details of the car. Two feed site with cameras were set up to try and attract and locate the greys. Two greys at least were spotted, traps were installed but with no success in trapping, the greys did investigate the traps but they would not venture into them. This is a problem associated with trapped and released greys. Their attendance at the feed site was not very regular the area is so big. The hope was in the winter they would be more willing to avail of the feed, but with weather conditions the site was hard to get to. Monitoring and control is still ongoing at the site.

This illegal, release of greys may have been because the increased pressure we have caused by publishing the earlier release of Greys around the Cushendun area. The person or person's doing it have now moved around the coast and found this isolated area where they feel the greys are safe.

Daniel McAfee, GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger and Vice Chair.

Ballypatrick Forest

Large blocks of conifer planting with a small number of broad leaf trees which were all self-seeded. Originally part of the first Squirrel Trail but due to works within the forestry and illegal felling, the squirrel population in the area vanished or moved on. We have found that squirrel activity in the area around the carpark has never picked up to the same as it was in 2015-2016 pre this work. With the Covid 19 restriction we were unable to attend to this wood as we had wished and were unable to install feeders as hoped last year. There are no permanent feeders at present, but we had a number of scatter feed areas for a few weeks and have found that squirrels activity in the overall forestry is good. Over the last few years there has been a lot of forestry work to the back end of the forestry with large blocks of forestry being removed. This is continuing at present between the main Cushendall road and Glenmakeeran side.

The cameras also showed that there are also several Pine Marten across the forestry and a large population of Deer. Bird activity can be mixed depending on location, along the edges and boundary's we picked up Jay, Magpies, Crows and a wide mix of small birds. A good population of Wood Mouse exists across the forestry.

We will have to see how this coming year goes, we now have a volunteer who is keen to do a few feeders in the wood.

Daniel McAfee, GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger and Vice Chair

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 Glen's Council. The Hide was funded by the NGO Challenge fund and has been a great asset for the woodland with the GRSG using it and the Councils Biodiversity Officer running events at the Hide with a number of groups booked to use it over the summer months, depending on restriction. The Group have been active with Grey Squirrel control in the wood from 2011 when the first Grey Squirrel was seen at the fixed feed site. Over the years, Grey Squirrel control has become an active and continuing part of the work that takes place in the wood. This year, we have had fewer greys picked up on our monitoring sites in the wood. We have a number of monitoring sites within the Nature Reserve. All the sites that we use here operate as scatter feed sites, although we have feeders around the Hide, these are not

filled to prevent the risk of reds and greys having direct contact with each other. The red population has continued to thrive, we are picking up reds at all our monitoring sites and the nearby houses and farms are also seeing more red activity.

This year has seen no group events at the Hide. The Hide was shut due to the Covid restrictions, as these restriction were lifted at times, we did have photographers, both local and not so local, coming to snap our Red Squirrels and the birds that visit the Hide. The window for booking was small and the Hide was not open for very long, squirrel activity did not drop around the hide with several been seen when feeding did take place. The Jays are still very nervous around the Hide but they are getting a little braver and on one visit this winter 19 were seen feeding in front of the Hide.

In 2015 a single Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was spotted in the wood. Over the last few years they have successfully had chicks and fledged young, this year with Covid 19, the birds nested at one of our scatter feed sites during the first lockdown. Although our volunteers were not out regularly scatter feeding at this site, the birds could be picked up in the background by the camera, the sound of the young begging could be heard so this was good news. Some of the photographers were able to snap the Woodpecker near the Hide.

There were a number of new arrivals to the Cregagh Wood this year. They all appeared over the lockdowns, some were picked up by our monitoring cameras and some were spotted by locals in the woods. Two Long Eared Owl chicks were spotted as they tried to make their way through the tree tops and spent several nights begging for food. At least 6 deer were picked up on the camera, two young stags and 3-4 females, ones of the stags, I spotted later in the far end of the wood, this was after restrictions were relaxed.. Most exciting was the arrival of 2 Pine Martens. They are young but have been there from April 2020. They have visited all our scatter feed sites. The reds have not been impacted and are happy to feed after the Pine Marten have been the night before. They have also had an impact on our Grey Squirrel numbers, as we have only had 2 visits by greys to our scatter feed sites. There has also been a reduction in the mice population at our scatter feed sites, which also could be linked to the Pine Martens.

Daniel McAfee, GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger and Vice Chair

Glendun

Apart from the Glenmona and Craigagh Wood there are 3 additional monitor sites. These are along the river Dun on private ground. These sites have cameras as they are near areas that had been in the past, part of control programs. This year has seen a reduction in the number of greys being picked up in these sites. The reason for this may be because we have been very vocal, both locally and province wide about the illegal release of greys that we know happened over the last number of years, the reasons for these sites being set up in the first place. The evidence we had at the time was the sheer numbers, the behaviour of these squirrels around traps and the age and condition of the greys. These sites when no grey activity takes place, are looked every two weeks. There are reds in the area and they have been doing very well. This year has seen a boom in their numbers with some having a third litter, this may have been down to the mild weather.

Daniel McAfee, GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger and Vice Chair.

Glenmona

The playground is still shut down because of intermitted grey activity. This has not had an impact on the red in the area as the National Trust Rangers have increased the feeding they do in and around the workshop and have taken on trapping when any grey has appeared. Several feeders are located around the Glenmona grounds in private gardens. These owners have taken on trap monitoring when needed. There has been a small amount of interest in Grey Squirrel control from some land owners in the area who were given feeders to monitor their lands.

Over Lockdown one of our volunteers was able to trap and remove a grey that was visiting gardens and the Caravan Park. It is hoped that if there are no additional sightings in the Glenmona House area, that the playground could be re-established.

Daniel McAfee, GRSG Red Squirrel Ranger and Vice Chair

Cushendall and Cottage Wood

I have several ongoing monitoring and feeding sites where I can assess if Red Squirrels are in an area and also whether they are in danger from Grey Squirrels who have just arrived in the area. Feeding, trapping and monitoring are regular in all these sites at different times of the year. I also liaise with residents and farmers around the area who give me access to their land and gardens and also inform me if they see any Grey Squirrel activity.

Sites

1. Glenville House, outside Cushendall. The gardens and fields of the house. There is a healthy Red Squirrel population on site. I currently have three feeding stations installed. Since Christmas I also had two cameras installed in this site.

At the start of winter 2020 I removed two Grey Squirrels on the site.

Last spring I removed approximately 15 Grey Squirrels on the same site.

2. Cottage Wood, Cushendall. I have several feeding stations installed. I have had reports of two Grey Squirrels visiting the Wood. I have had cameras placed on site.

3. Chapel Road, Cushendall. Residents told me of two grey squirrels passing through their gardens. These may be the squirrels that were spotted in Cottage Wood. I set up feeding stations and cameras and removed the squirrels.

4. Cushendall River. I have a feeding station along the Cushendall River. It is visited by reds and occasionally I install a camera to check if any greys have appeared.

5. Gaults Road. I have several other sites along Gault's Road and the area surrounding Gault's Road that I occasionally monitor and install feeder stations to check for any grey activity.

6. Shore Road. I have two sites on the Shore Road, Cushendall, with feeding stations in the gardens of resident's houses and where I occasionally install cameras to monitor activity.

7. On the Waterfoot Road, I also have a resident who allows feeding stations and cameras in their garden. Greys have been removed from this site in the past.

8. Cushendun. There are several sites around Cushendun where I install occasional feeding stations and cameras.

Raymond Watson, GRSG Volunteer.

Glenariff and Parkmore Forest Park

The last twelve months have been an exciting time in Parkmore Forest Park in Glenariff. We had a shutdown due to the Coronavirus when the Park was closed for a few months. However it didn't take us long to get back to normal and the squirrels did not seem to mind - they were as active as ever. Sightings are frequent, in fact one was spotted in a garden near the beach. Greys are rarely reported and a sighting is not always confirmed. We had an isolated Grey road kill about half a mile outside Waterfoot Village on the Glenariff Road, but I suspect it came over the hill from Cargan.

Our Reds seem to be in a very healthy state - Road kills are rare and the feeders confirm they are certainly enjoying their food. Visitors to the Forest Park have increased dramatically due to the Coronavirus and I would suspect this can only help the squirrels as some welcome titbits are invariably left behind.

So all in all it has been a good year for Parkmore Forest Park and I've no doubt there is a very bright future for our Reds.

Joe McKavanagh, GRSG Volunteer

Ballyeamon Barn

Over the past year we have had up to three red squirrels coming to use the feeders at Ballyeamon Barn. During lockdown watching the antics of these little creatures has brightened up many a dreary day. Unfortunately during February the trees to the rear of the barn have been harvested by the Forest Service and only one squirrel has been seen in the weeks since then. We do hope they will return as they are a very welcome sight which will be much appreciated by tourists if and when we can reopen for business.

Liz Weir, Chair GRSG

Martinstown and Glenravel

This year has still been difficult with the ongoing Covid restrictions. As a result, I continued to manage the wider Glenravel area and help out in Glenariff when needed. Thankfully there have been few sightings of Grey Squirrels, and any that came through on the Hotline number were dealt with accordingly. By removing them as they come into this area, I am preventing them from moving down into Glenariff Forest Park and further down the glen.



8 year old Molly and Grace helping to replace Red Squirrel Feeders in Glenariff.

So other than replacing and repairing feeders in surrounding areas things have been quiet, thankfully.

Paul McHugh, GRSG Volunteer

Carnlough

There are 15 feeders in the wider Carnlough area 7 of which I look after, the other 8 are attended by volunteers. At the end of the summer "20" the council closed off the Waterfalls because of a landslide. During this period they cutback the trees here and on the Waterfall road causing me to re-position 4 feeders. 2 of my feeders are located within the Waterfalls area, which remains closed off forcing me to abandon them until the work is completed.

The camera that went missing "Stolen" last May was returned (placed beside one of my feeders) several months later, so it was nice to have it returned. Covid has put a spanner in the works for everything this year.

Gabriel McAuley, GRSG Ranger

Glenarm

I took over the feeding, monitoring and maintenance duties from Denis McBride in Glenarm Forest in summer 2019. Since then have retained six feeders, with two on upper path near to carpark and four along lower path by the river. All are visited regularly and are replenished on a weekly basis. Due to damage either by Reds or Pine Martin or on at least one occasion human interference, regular maintenance has to be carried out with lids having to be replaced on an ongoing basis. Four feeding boxes have been completely renewed - summer 2020.



Spring 2020, supplied materials and established feeders for local residents following a flurry of reports of Reds visiting garden bird tables etc. along the Layde walk in the village - approx. six feeders erected and agreed to be serviced privately. These are maintained and refilled on an irregular basis by a number of locals. Reports from this area have diminished.

Throughout this period - summer 2020 to present I have received several reports of Grey Squirrel activity: Straidkilly Wood, Libbert (Feystown Road, Glenarm) and once in Glenarm Forest. To date I

have not managed to trap any of these animals as they have not been visiting particular sites regularly enough, but appear to be passing animals. I have, however, dispatched two (Spring 2020) on the Munie Road, neither of which were officially recorded as I was not aware of the necessity to do so at that time.

In the spring and again in late summer of 2020 I gave socially distanced talks to children from Seaview Primary School, of various year groups, both in the school and in Glenarm Forest as part of their environmental studies.

From my own observations and local anecdotal evidence, numbers of Reds in Glenarm Forest and surrounding area remain very healthy and no particular problems have been noted. Road kills on the Munie Road, which I travel several times per day, remain an issue. Numbers this past year, 2020-21 have been much lower than previous years, possibly due to reduced traffic flow because of pandemic. Nevertheless, I have still found three road casualties.

Colin Urwin, GRSG Volunteer

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 are able to train volunteers in Grey Squirrel Control (as a non-native alien species), have knowledge of the legislation governing wildlife protection and animal welfare. They are able to 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 nothing like any other year before for GRSG. With Covid 19 Lockdowns, travel restrictions and restrictions regarding meeting people, it has been very strange year. Tasks that I would not have had a second thought about doing, have been changed to some degree.

Call outs about Grey Squirrel reports in gardens have had to be assessed by risk to Red Squirrel. The more the risk that grey poses to our Glens Red Squirrels the more likely hood I would have looked into it. Before Covid this would not have been the case every grey posed an issue, this is still the case but in the current situation it's the safest way to work.

After the first lockdown and as restrictions eased Bubble walks were offered, these were to families and to individuals with the Ballycastle area interested in seeing Red Squirrels. These bubble walks were short lived as restrictions came back into place. Over the window that the walks did take place there were 2 family walks and 3 single walks all of which were very successful. With squirrels been seen on all walks so this was very rewarding and was a small glint of the work that the GRSG had missed out on over the year, engaging, educating and encouraging people to enjoy the Red that call the Glens their home.

Feeding over the first Lockdown was stopped as forestry's were closed to all visitors as restrictions eased feeding resumed with travel limits. I have seen activity such as walking and running in the forestry's rise. With many taking more interest in the wildlife and going out of their way to stop and chat about the reds and what they have seen. Many now report any issues they spot with feeders such as feeders having fallen or damage such as lids off, this has been of great help as I can be prepared to fix boxes that I know are down.

With the use of Facebook we have still been able to engage with people within the Glens and beyond, we have also been able to see photos that people have been able to snap while out in woods and

forestry's. Glenarm Forestry was very popular with photographers, with a number of photos being posed on other FB pages the GRSG FB page shared as many of these as we were able to. It was great to see people out enjoying the work that was being done by our volunteers.

This have been a very different year hopefully as things improve and will return to where we can take a group of people or a school out and show them the work we are doing to save our Red Squirrels.

Daniel McAfee GRSG Ranger.

Gabriel McAuley's Report

With Covid ongoing all year, my work has been light. Most of my contact with the general public has been through contact while attending to my feeders. Carnlough and the Cranny Falls area have been a popular tourist attraction during "Lockdown", so I have made contact with a lot of people, many from outside the area who have shown a great interest in our work and in Red Squirrels in general.

A friend supplied me 3 half sheets of exterior quality plywood which is ideal for cutting into feeder lids. I have been making feeders as and when required. I have a very willing junior assistant in this department.



Ben busy helping to make some Squirrel feeders.

Gabriel McAuley GRSG Ranger.

Gerard Mc Caughan's Report

Because of Covid I was not as busy as I normally would be. Thankfully we continued to get reports of sightings of both Red and Grey Squirrels and this keep me in touch with what was happening throughout the Glens and in touch with all our volunteers. I had some work to do in the Curragh, planting a few fruit trees and general maintenance of the site. I applied for the Micro grant again this year which we got. The Charity Commission report and the GRSG yearly report also took up some of my time. After Christmas I was approached by Mid and East Antrim Borough Council regarding the groups work. A donation followed, which was very useful as the normal events that we hold during the year that help our finances could not happen.

After Daniels TV appearance, we got a lot of inquiries regarding our work and also about the equipment that we use from all over the UK. The answering and replying to these inquiries, took a lot of time, but it was very uplifting to realise that so many people had seen the Country File program and were encouraged to put pen to paper and also consider doing something to help Red Squirrel conservation, even if it was in their own areas.

I also was involved with NI Direct in the construction of our new web site as the old one had got tired and was badly out of date. All reports about the new web site have been favourable. This one has been designed to be future proof, so should last us for some time.

Gerard Mc Caughan GRSG Ranger.

Equipment Report.

As stated above I applied for the Rural Micro Capital Grant Scheme 2020, which is provided by Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and administered by the Northern Area Community Network. We applied for equipment that we needed to replace old equipment. Once equipment becomes unreliable, it is of little use to us and by having a few extra bits, we can supply more volunteers with equipment and this is beneficial to help us maintain the population of Red Squirrel in the Glens of Antrim and surrounding areas. As in all grants, two quotes are required for anything that we want to get, so the completing of the application forms and associated paperwork was very time consuming.

In January 2021, I started the Annual Equipment Audit. Thankfully the audit forms came back a lot quicker this year than on previous years, so I had the audit completed by mid-February.

Gerard Mc Caughan, GRSG Ranger and Equipment Caretaker.

Squirreltober Report 2020.

Due to covid19 restrictions it was felt that this year the group had a responsibility not only to keep our reds safe but to keep the people of the Glens safe as well. With the R number on the up it was felt that the group had an obligation to do as much as possible to prevent Covid19, so with this in mind we didn't run any public events during Red Squirrel awareness week or **Squirreltober**. We did keep our on-line presence going to help raise the profile of Red Squirrels.

In the current pandemic we felt that was best for all but it has meant that we have lost our main fund-raising opportunities.

As things stand at present, it is unlikely that there will be any public events for October 2020.

Forest Service Northern Ireland and GRSG Partnership.



Over the last number of years and 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 property's (Ballycastle, 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 come in contact with its wildlife. This is where we, with our feeding sites give people the chance to see our native Red Squirrels that make the forestry's their home.

This partnership has allowed us to highlight the fact that "Yes" we do have Red Squirrel in the Glens. An issue we had found is that people didn't know we had Red Squirrels in Northern Ireland let alone the Glens but with our work with the Forest Service NI and within their Forestry's 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 the overall health of our Red Squirrels. Our volunteers do keep a close checks on our squirrels conditions. Part of this good health is down to very little encroachment of Grey Squirrels within the Forest Service NI property's that we work in. We believe there are several reasons for this, one is because of the publics vigilance and forestry staffs vigilance as they are quick to report to us any greys they see. A second reason is because most of Forest Service NI property's in the Glens are home to Pine Martens. The presents 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 property's vary 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 link with, within the Glens area are a vital asset to the work we do and assisting us with that work. If it's 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, who has assisted with education walks that we have held over the last year, Liz's knowledge and manner of portraying this knowledge to those on the walk is brilliant. Liz is a true asset to the Forest Service NI. We also must thank Jim Marshall. Jim has been key in our planning for setting up site 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 property's, 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. 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.

Over all we see this partnership going from strength to strength for the protection of Red Squirrels in the Glen and we are very great full for it.

2020-21 Monthly Reports

Sadly due to the Covid 19 pandemic there were no public events run. This has been a very difficult year for all and the small steps we have taken by not running or holding events has hopefully helped but have definitely had an impact on the group.

Reflection of work over the from 2015/2016 to 2020/2021

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

Total 141.5 hours.

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

Total 87

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

Total 92h

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

Total 40h

2020/2021

Walks	5	average 2-2.5 hours	Average total hours 12.5h
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Total 12.5h

These hours do not include hours that volunteers put into feeding, trapping, monitoring and survey work or committee meetings.

We did have a few stories to tell over the year.

June 2020

Red Squirrels Shop in Ballycastle Co-op

In June the Co-op in Ballycastle started to have a few new customers, the local Red Squirrels started to visit them. They were coming into the back yard and running along the wall at the start and as they got braver, they were coming up to the back doors of the store room. Once we hear about these Red Squirrels, one of our Rangers went and visited the store. He discovered that the staff were so delighted to see the Red Squirrels that they were leaving out bits of fruit for them along the back wall. We erected a Red Squirrel feeder for them on this wall.



Lauretta and her Red Squirrel Feeder.

The Red Squirrels continued to visit the feeder and enjoy the fresh fruit until the middle of August when their natural food became available and they then stopped coming.

July 2020

Donation of Fruit Trees to the Curragh

In July I got a phone call from David and Gloria Hassen, asking us if we would like some fruit trees. They had to remove a number of fruit trees from their garden and they had heard about the GRSG and would we be interested in them.

The fruit trees consisted of a Brambly Apple, a Gala type Apple, a Pear, 2 Victoria Plums and 2 Cherry trees. As it was in the middle of the summer and the trees had been growing for a number of years, this was going to be quite a challenge.

David started by pruned the heads of the fruit trees back to reduce their size. Then he took his time digging out the root balls with plenty of soil. The root balls were then wrapped in a covering to prevent them from drying out. He then transported them to Glenshesk and the Curragh where they were stored under shelter from the sun to prevent the sun drying out the root balls until I got them planted. I spent a few days planting them out. I provided them with plenty of water and I was delighted that the leaves that were on the branches remained green and stayed on the trees for the remainder of the summer. All of them survives, which was great to see. I was hopeful at that stage that we had been successful in our transplanting of the fruit trees, this spring would tell the story.

Spring 2021. All the Fruit trees have burst into life in the spring and David and I were so delighted that all our work had not been for nothing. Buds have started to appear on all of the trees and we are looking forward to a small crop of fruit this year, if the birds and Red Squirrels let them ripen.



Once again I would like to thank Gloria and David Hassen for considering the GRSG for their fruit trees and I also want to thank David for all the hard work digging out the trees for us.

Gerard Mc Caughan, GRSG Ranger and Equipment Caretaker.

October 2020

We got the good news that we have been awarded the funding from the DfC Small Capital Grants fund. This funding is only available where five or more local groups come together and apply as a combined group. The other members in the group were

- Friends of Glenariff/ Glenariff Community & Recreation Centre
- Oisins CLG
- Glens Red Squirrel Group
- St Patrick's Parents, Friends & Teachers Association
- Antrim Glens Tourism
- Glens Running Club

We had applied for funding to buy two marquees which are now available to all the members of the group to use.

18-10-2020

We got a report from a member who reported several sightings of a Red Squirrel at the back of the Fold in Cushendall.

February 2021

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

We got an e mail from "Mid and East Antrim Borough Council" offering us a donation. They recognise the work we do within their Council area maintaining and preserving the Red Squirrel. We as a group really appreciate this donation to help fund our work in Glenarm, Carnlough and the surrounding areas. We have been working with the council for a few years and we hope this partnership will continue for many years to come.



PROGRESSIVE
BUILDING SOCIETY

Progressive Building Society in Coleraine.

Just before Christmas I was in the Progressive Building Society in Coleraine and during the conversation, I was told about their new office that they hoped to move into soon. Due to Covid 19 the staff here, like a lot of other banks and Building Societies work behind Perspex Screens. As we in the GRSG need Perspex for making up our Red Squirrel feeders, I asked if they were not using the Perspex from their old office in the new one, could we the GRSG have it. After a few days I got a phone call, saying that they would be delighted to donate the old Perspex to our group and that they were delighted to be able to support such a deserving cause.

I waited until the old office had been cleared out and then went over to collect it. I was surprised and delighted at the amount of Perspex sheets that I collected. Twelve large sheets, not to mention the Perspex that was around the counter. This will keep us going for a few years and will really help our Red Squirrels here in the Glens of Antrim.

We make all our own feeders to keep the cost down. A small sheet of Perspex is put at the front of each of our feeders. This means that the Red Squirrels, while enjoying the food inside the feeder, can look out for any unwanted attention.



Branch manager Lorraine Johnston with GRSG Ranger Gerard Mc Caughan

The Glens Red Squirrel group would like to thank the Branch Manager, Lorraine Johnston and her staff Jane, Amber, Melanie and Dan for their help.

Gerard Mc Caughan, GRSG Ranger and Equipment Caretaker.

Thanks to our Supporters.

The Glens Red Squirrel Group wish to thank those individuals, groups and organisations who have worked with, and have supported the Glens Red Squirrel Group in our work this year:-

The NI Forestry Service have been very helpful to us over the years and have supported us in all our work. A special thanks goes to Liz O Connor, Forest Service NI Educational Guide for all her help and advice. Causeway Coast and Glens Council, North Antrim Community Network, Glenariff Improvement Group, Northern Ireland Squirrel Forum, Ulster Wildlife, BBC Country File team, Richmond's Feeds, Ballyeamon Barn, NI Direct, Boyles Spar Ballycastle and Carnlough, William Hamill & Sons and the Progressive Building Society, Coleraine.

The Group would like to thank those dedicated members who carry out feeding, trapping, attending information stalls, walks, talks, tree planting and other events that the group are asked to attend. A 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 wasn't for all the hard work of all these members.

We would also like to thank all those who made donations to the group to help us over this stressful time. Due to the present circumstances, we have not been able to gather resources from our usual means and so these donations are helping us through these lean times.