

PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL**Environment Committee****20 November 2013****CONTROL OF GREY SQUIRRELS ON COUNCIL LAND****Depute Director (Environment)**

This report outlines the actions being undertaken to identify how large the grey squirrel population is on Council land and outlines the options available to the Council to address any potential impacts that grey squirrels may be having on native red squirrels as a result.

1. BACKGROUND / MAIN ISSUES

- 1.1 At the Environment Committee meeting on 5 June 2013, a deputation from the Perth and Kinross Red Squirrel Group (PKRSG) addressed the committee and a motion, proposed by Councillors W. Robertson and M. Lyle, was agreed. The motion required that a "report would be prepared with recommendations on how we, as a Council, can support the control of grey squirrels on land under our control and in so doing encourage the reintroduction of our native red squirrel to our parks and open spaces thus promoting biodiversity and supporting the local economy through wildlife tourism."
- 1.2 A national programme, Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels (SSRS), is a project that has been running since 2009 (due to end in 2014) with the aim to stop the decline of Scotland's Red Squirrel population, currently estimated at around 121,000. SSRS are working to prevent the further displacement of red squirrels by grey squirrels by, targeting grey squirrel control at locations where grey squirrels are spreading northwards from the Central Lowlands. This is being carried out by a combination of Project Officers, landowners and householders trapping grey squirrels to form a co-ordinated Red Squirrel Protection Network across all of Scotland. According to SSRS, Perth & Kinross Council land is strategically important to the success of halting the spread of grey squirrels north, into the Highlands. The project has built a network of participating estates across Perth & Kinross with over 60 estates now involved, including the Forestry Commission.
- 1.3 The PKRSG, which has been in existence since 1994 is now affiliated to the SSRS. It is a group of likeminded individuals who want to see red squirrels return to being the dominant species in Perth & Kinross. PKRSG are active in promoting themselves and their aims on social media and at public events such as the Kilt Run and the Scottish Game Fair. In addition they have provided a briefing note setting out some background information, and their suggested approach to the issue in Appendix 1.

- 1.4 Grey squirrels pose a threat to red squirrels by competing with them for food and habitat resources. In areas where red and grey squirrels coexist, the presence of grey squirrels results in reduced survival rates amongst red squirrel young, and also reduced reproductive rates, causing the gradual decline in red squirrel populations over time. In addition, in the south of Scotland, some grey squirrels carry the squirrelpox virus which is fatal only to red squirrels.
- 1.5 Targeted grey squirrel control is not the sole solution and should be considered along with other measures including habitat management such as creating large areas of linked woodland habitat to favour red squirrels, development of a vaccine against the squirrelpox virus and immuno-contraception for grey squirrels.
- 1.6 The red squirrel was one of the first species to be protected under the UK Biodiversity Plan in 1995. Red squirrels, and their dreys, are listed on Schedule 5 and 6 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and red squirrels are a Priority Species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and are also included on the Scottish Biodiversity List (Species & Habitats of Principal Importance for Biodiversity Conservation in Scotland). They are one of the “Big 5” named by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) in this, the Year of Natural Scotland.
- 1.7 In order to address the red squirrel issue, SNH and the Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) published a joint action plan in April 2011, the main points of which are:
 - a. Monitor the spread of grey squirrels in Scotland, and support their control in key areas to prevent further losses of red squirrel populations. This work includes disease monitoring programmes in key areas
 - b. Establish and manage a series of large public forests as long-term red squirrel strongholds and encourage private woodland managers in these areas to manage their woodlands in a similar way
 - c. Encourage wider habitat management that supports red squirrel populations
 - d. Encourage consideration of red squirrels in planning or development proposals likely to affect their habitat.
- 1.8 The SNH publication “Strategic Priorities for Red Squirrel Conservation in Scotland” (January 2004) includes proposed Red Squirrel stronghold sites and Priority Areas for grey squirrel control. This aims to eliminate any populations of grey squirrels north of a line that follows the Highland Boundary Fault from St Fillans in the west to Hill of Alyth in the east of Perth & Kinross.
- 1.9 Grey squirrel control should ideally be employed in conjunction with the management of red squirrel strongholds. Grey squirrel control to defend red squirrel strongholds should be the priority in order to maintain viable core populations of red squirrels as a basis for their widespread conservation. There is only one red squirrel stronghold in Perth & Kinross at south Loch Rannoch, and two priority areas for grey squirrel control around Loch Earn, west of St Fillans, and an area north of Dunkeld and Bridge of Cally, stretching north as far as Calvine and west to Kenmore. (see map produced by Scottish Natural Heritage and Forestry Commission Scotland at Appendix 2)

- 1.10 A large number of estates and landowners are already actively working with both SSRS and PKRSG to support red squirrel populations in Perth & Kinross. These groups have suggested that, without the support of Perth & Kinross Council, their work to remove grey squirrels would be less effective as grey squirrels on Council land could continue to breed and undermine efforts on the other estates.
- 1.11 Other councils, notably, Dundee, Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Fife have control programmes in place, and are working alongside SSRS to control grey squirrels on their land.

2. PROPOSALS

- 2.1 It is proposed that the Council work with the SSRS and PKRSG in the following manner. In order to establish the extent and degree of the grey squirrel population in Perth & Kinross, it is proposed that the Council allows the erection and monitoring of squirrel monitoring feeders in the following public parks and open spaces.

Site Name	AREA (ha)	Maximum Number feeders	WARD NO	Ward Name
Den of Alyth	20.37	20	2	Strathmore
Keithbank mill, Blairgowrie	1.06	1	3	Blairgowrie and Glens
Cuttleburn den, Blairgowrie	0.06	1	3	Blairgowrie and Glens
Knock of Crieff	24.47	24	6	Strathearn
Macrosty park, Crieff	10.37	10	6	Strathearn
Hilton hill Callarfountain, Perth	12.00	12	9	Almond and Earn
St Magdalenes hill, Perth	32.35	32	10	Perth City South
Kinnoull hill woodland east, Perth	53.34	53	12	Perth City Centre
Kinnoull hill woodland east, Perth	19.64	19	12	Perth City Centre
Kinnoull hill woodland park, Perth	3.21	3	12	Perth City Centre
Inchture park	2.43	2	1	Carse of Gowrie
Wood & rear path Westfield, Luncarty	3.44	3	5	Strathtay
Abernethy glen walk	1.34	1	9	Almond and Earn
Scone park	4.84	4	2	Strathmore

- 2.2 These sites tie in with the SSRS Project jointly run by The Scottish Wildlife Trust, SNH, FCS and Scottish Land and Estates. To find out whether red and grey squirrels are present or absent in a particular area, each feeder box will be visited by PKRSG volunteers a total of three times, over a period of six weeks in the spring 2014.
- 2.3 Three hair samples will be collected from each box and hairs will be examined under a microscope by SSRS to identify which species are present. Each area will then be allocated to one of the following four categories:
- red squirrels only
 - grey squirrels only
 - both species
 - neither species
- 2.4 There will be no cost to the Council as the erection and monitoring of the feeder boxes will be undertaken by volunteers from PKRSG. The Tayside Biodiversity Partnership has agreed to fund the purchase of the squirrel feeder boxes.
- 2.5 Options for Future Control
- 2.5.1 Once the results of the hair analysis is known, it will be possible to identify whether grey squirrels occur on a chosen site, and if control of grey squirrels becomes a consideration. In the event that grey squirrels are evident on council managed land, the Council would have to make a decision on whether it would agree to the control of grey squirrels on this land. It is therefore proposed that the Council review the findings of the squirrel monitoring to be undertaken in the spring of 2014, and consider the results at that point.

3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 If the national programme of grey squirrel control is to be successful, all land owners and managers, including the Council, would need to control grey squirrels on their land. It is recommended that the Council allow PKRSG and SSRS to survey and monitor squirrel populations on Council managed sites as detailed in section 2.1 to establish what measures are required to undertake further control if required.
- 3.2 It is therefore recommended that the Committee agrees to:
- (1) Allow the Perth and Kinross Red Squirrel Society to undertake a survey to monitor squirrel populations in Council managed locations detailed in this report during Spring 2014.
 - (2) Report back to Committee on the outcome of the survey, and any further recommended actions.

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1. IMPLICATIONS, ASSESSMENTS, CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

Strategic Implications	Yes / None
Community Plan / Single Outcome Agreement	None
Corporate Plan	None
Resource Implications	None
Financial	None
Workforce	None
Asset Management (land, property, IST)	Yes
Assessments	Not required
Equality Impact Assessment	Not required
Strategic Environmental Assessment	Not required
Sustainability (community, economic, environmental)	None
Legal and Governance	None
Risk	Yes
Consultation	Yes
Internal	Yes
External	Yes
Communication	Yes
Communications Plan	Yes

1. Strategic Implications

Community Plan / Single Outcome Agreement

- 1.1 In terms of “Creating a Safe and Sustainable Place for Future Generations” this report aims to provide an enhanced and protected natural environment.

Corporate Plan

- 1.2 This report supports the Council’s Corporate Plan 2013 – 18 objective of :
- Creating a safe and sustainable place for future generations

2. Resource Implications

Financial

- 2.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Workforce

- 2.2 There are no workforce Issues arising from this report.

Asset Management (land, property, IT)

- 2.3 The proposals in the report will take place on land under the control of the Council and there are no implications for Council assets.

3. Assessments

Equality Impact Assessment

- 3.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council is required to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between equality groups. Carrying out Equality Impact Assessments for plans and policies allows the Council to demonstrate that it is meeting these duties.
- 3.2 This section should reflect that the proposals have been considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment process (EqIA) with the following outcome:
- (i) Assessed as **not relevant** for the purposes of EqIA

Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 3.3 The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 places a duty on the Council to identify and assess the environmental consequences of its proposals. The proposals have been considered under the Act and no further action is required as it does not qualify as a PPS as defined by the Act and is therefore exempt.

Sustainability

- 3.4 Under the provisions of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 the Council has to discharge its duties in a way which contributes to the achievement of sustainable development. In terms of the Climate Change Act, the Council has a general duty to demonstrate its commitment to sustainability and the community, environmental and economic impacts of its actions.
- 3.5 The proposals have been assessed in terms of the requirements to manage the Council's Greenspace assets in a sustainable long term way.

Legal and Governance

- 3.6 The Head of Finance, the Head of Legal Services and the Head of Planning and Regeneration have been consulted on the report.

Risk

- 3.7 There is a risk that individuals and groups could be affected by the proposals in this report. The Council is able to support the proposals as there is a requirement under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan to protect Red Squirrels.

4. Consultation

Internal

- 4.1 Head of Finance, the Head of Legal Services and the Head of Planning and Regeneration have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

External

- 4.2 Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels and the Perth and Kinross Red Squirrel Group have been fully consulted on the production of this report

5. Communication

- 5.1 Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels, Perth and Kinross Red Squirrel Group and the Council will be involved in informing the public of the recommendations in the report.

2. BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers have been presented in the preparation of this report.

3. APPENDICES

- Appendix 1 - PKRSG briefing paper for Perth & Kinross Council 09 2013
- Appendix 2 – Map of Strategic Priority Areas produced by Scottish Natural Heritage and Forestry Commission Scotland



Perth and Kinross

Red Squirrel Group

Briefing paper prepared for Perth & Kinross Council, September 2013

Introduction

The purpose of this briefing paper is to:

- Introduce Perth & Kinross Red Squirrel Group
- Outline the current co-ordinated effort taking place right across Scotland to control grey squirrels
- Provide the legal framework for red squirrel conservation / grey control
- Describe how PKRSG can assist Perth & Kinross Council (PKC) in its biodiversity duties the short to medium term (2014-15) and further red squirrel conservation on land that PKC manages

About Perth & Kinross Red Squirrel Group

Perth and Kinross Red Squirrel Group (PKRSG) is a volunteer-led organisation with a primary purpose: to protect and increase red squirrel populations across the Perth & Kinross unitary authority region. Established in 1994 (as Perthshire Squirrel Group) PKRSG currently has 140 subscribing members (which in addition to householders includes businesses such as hotels as well as organisations such as public schools and golf clubs) and a further 130 Facebook members/followers. Of those subscribing members, 95 are currently controlling grey squirrels on land under their ownership/management via the PKRSG trap loan scheme - coverage extends from highland Perthshire to the south of Kinross-shire. Please refer to **Appendix 1** for a graphical illustration of current PKRSG trapping coverage.

In addition to direct grey control, PKRSG frequently engages with the public to highlight red squirrel conservation issues. For example in 2013 PKRSG has to date presented to the following: Loch Leven Users Group at RSPB Vane Farm; Glenfarg SWRI; Forteviot SWRI; U3A Pitlochry; Pitcairngreen Community Council. PKRSG also engages annually with the public at the Scottish Game Fair, Scone Palace and had a stall at this year's Perth Kilt Run.

Why grey squirrel control – background

The replacement of the native red squirrel population by [the non-native invasive grey squirrel](#) (Eastern Gray Squirrel - *Sciurus carolinensis*) across the United Kingdom has been well documented with the recent historical impact

frequently illustrated¹. Scotland's red squirrel population has been declining at an alarming rate in the last 50 years. Just as in the vast majority of England and Wales where they are already extinct, the red squirrels in mainland Scotland are at risk of dying out completely². Red squirrels and grey squirrels cannot co-exist, primarily due to [competition for resources and disease](#) with the grey being a carrier and distributor of squirrelpox virus (SQPV) that causes high mortality in the red squirrel population³. An academic review on the effectiveness of large scale red squirrel conservation activity (across the northern counties of England bordering Scotland) concluded⁴ the following:

'The three key components of any future red squirrel conservation strategy are grey squirrel control, conservation and community engagement. The most critical component is the control of grey squirrels.'

Grey control in Scotland – a co-ordinated effort

Scotland is home to over 75% of the remaining UK red squirrel population⁵, on the Scottish Biodiversity list⁶ and the Species Action Framework⁷. To support the red squirrel in Scotland, a national red squirrel conservation scheme is currently in place (to 2014), led by the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) under the project name Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels (SSRS) with funding from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) and others. Grey control is regarded by the Scottish Government via the Scottish Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 (SRDP) as a biodiversity priority where red squirrels are present or in close proximity to greys e.g. [the Tayside Region](#) (TAY 11).

Controlling grey squirrels forms an integral part of the SSRS project in South Scotland (Scottish Borders, Dumfries & Galloway, South Ayrshire, East Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire authorities). SSRS has helped 96 landowners (covering 223,940 hectares) receive SRDP funding to carry out grey control under 5 year contracts. Further estates and landowners undertake grey control voluntarily assisted by SSRS via its trap loan scheme.

Across the central Lowlands, defined by the SSRS project as Tayside (Angus, Perth & Kinross and Dundee City authorities) and Argyll & Trossachs (Stirling, Argyll & Bute authorities which includes the Loch Lomond national park area), there are 76 estates undertaking grey control via SRDP contracts. Again a number of other estates in these two project areas and landowners are supported by SSRS to control grey squirrels voluntarily via trap loan (e.g. 59 in the Tayside region).

The final SSRS region is North East Scotland (Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Council) with around 120 householders in Aberdeen City itself supporting the project by trapping greys in their gardens. 11 estates are funded via SRDP for grey control in this region.

Across each of the SSRS regions seasonal grey control officers (SGCO) are employed to further control coverage (for example on estates/land not covered by SRDP such as individual farms and gardens). To give an idea of numbers, 2009 to 2012 saw the SGCOs in the North East and Central Lowlands project areas catch just under 3,000 greys⁸.

Fife is not part of the SSRS project however has a separate complementary Fife Red Squirrel Project (FRSP) with a grey control programme to protect local red squirrel populations. It focusses on nine key sites for red squirrels (as listed in the Fife Species Action Plan) and their 3km buffer zones. A grey squirrel control programme co-ordinator is contracted to engage, train and support c. 20 landowners/householders per site. Over 250 traps have been distributed so far. In addition to this the project runs grey squirrel control workshops with BASC; over 60 people have been trained so far.

In addition to the above FCS directly undertakes grey control at a number of key sites not covered by SRDP e.g. Tentsmuir Forest in Fife and has a long term Red Squirrel Stronghold strategy⁹. FCS also directly funds SGCOs for SSRS to work on the National Forest Estate in South Scotland.

¹ <http://rsst.org.uk/about-us/faqs/>

² <http://www.snh.gov.uk/about-scotlands-nature/species/mammals/land-mammals/squirrels/>

³ [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/ukrsg_NECR019.pdf/\\$FILE/ukrsg_NECR019.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/ukrsg_NECR019.pdf/$FILE/ukrsg_NECR019.pdf) (Executive Summary)

⁴ [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/ukrsg_NECR019.pdf/\\$FILE/ukrsg_NECR019.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/ukrsg_NECR019.pdf/$FILE/ukrsg_NECR019.pdf) (Future Strategies)

⁵ <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestry.nsf/byunique/infd-8f2jfy>

⁶ <http://www.biodiversityscotland.gov.uk/advice-and-resources/scottish-biodiversity-list/categories/>

⁷ <http://www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/species-action-framework/species-action-list/red-squirrel/>

⁸ Savings Scotland's Red Squirrels Annual Conference, March 2012

⁹ <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-8f2lb5>

Finally the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) via its Red Squirrel Conservation Action Plan (2011-2016) ¹⁰ has identified a list of key sites where grey control now takes place (two in Fife undertaken jointly with FRSP). In summary, there is a large-scale, structured and co-ordinated effort underway across hundreds of thousands of acres in Scotland to control grey squirrels: from the largest private estates to the smallest private gardens. As previously indicated, Perth & Kinross Red Squirrel Group is very much part of that exercise and reinforces existing control efforts.

The legal framework for red squirrel protection and humane grey control

The primary statute which addresses red squirrel protection is the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Red squirrels by way of their inclusion on Schedule 5 and 6 of the Act have legal protection such that, amongst other provisions it is illegal to intentionally kill or injure them. This protection was strengthened by the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 such that anyone who commits an offence against a red squirrel must be able to demonstrate they took 'reasonable precautions' to avoid or minimise the damage caused.

It is worth noting that there is no provision in Scots Law, under either the 1981 or 2004 Acts for the legal destruction of red squirrel dreys (for forestry or development purposes) though there is provision for the licensing of certain activities which would otherwise be illegal. Finally red squirrels are protected under the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996 which makes it illegal to subject them to unnecessary suffering and any wilful act of cruelty or abuse.

Grey squirrels are also subject to a number of statutes, the key summary of provisions of which are listed below:

Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981: Greys are listed under Schedule 9 which make it illegal to release (or permit escape into the wild) a captive (i.e. live-trapped) grey squirrel

Wild Mammals (Protection Act) 1996: Makes it an offence to subject grey squirrels to any wilful act of cruelty or abuse

Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006: Provides for a duty of care for animals in captivity i.e. live-trapped animals and makes it an offence to inflict (or allow others to inflict) cruelty or abuse on a captive grey squirrel.

None of the above Acts (or other legal instruments) makes it an offence to dispatch grey squirrels – grey squirrel control is a legal activity which does not need to be licensed and grey squirrels have no formal legal protection other than the animal welfare legislation outlined above. To ensure compliance with the relevant animal welfare legislation only certain dispatch methods are widely considered to be within the law (though there is no legal precedent in Scotland regarding which dispatch methods are categorically illegal). PKRSG follows the SSRS Standard Operating Procedures for Grey Squirrel Control, specifically section 6.2 on Shooting. This procedure details the use of an air rifle (or pistol) with a calibre of .22 to deliver a fatal shot (to the back of the head) of a trapped grey squirrel to ensure immediate death. Sections 6 and 4.3 address the transportation of trapped greys to a suitable location for dispatch if the capture location itself is unsuitable.

Method Statement on PKRSG support for grey control on PKC land

PKRSG propose supporting PKC to undertake a limited volunteer led grey squirrel control programme on PKC managed greenspaces (specific sites and number of traps per site to be determined and will be influenced by existing control arrangements in the immediate vicinity of PKC sites) which will both complement and enhance the existing grey control effort currently taking place right across large sections of Scotland. The volunteer control programme would take place in 2014/15 upon conclusion of a feeder box monitoring exercise at key sites to determine whether grey squirrels were present (or not) and would ultimately offer a temporary solution in advance of PKC securing SRDP funding for grey control. Once SRDP funding was secured the volunteer programme would be phased out as the 5 year SRDP contract became active, the expectation being that PKC would either directly or indirectly employ a dedicate seasonal grey control officer (or officers).

¹⁰ http://www.nts.org.uk/site/docs/news/red_squirrel_conservation_action_plan.pdf

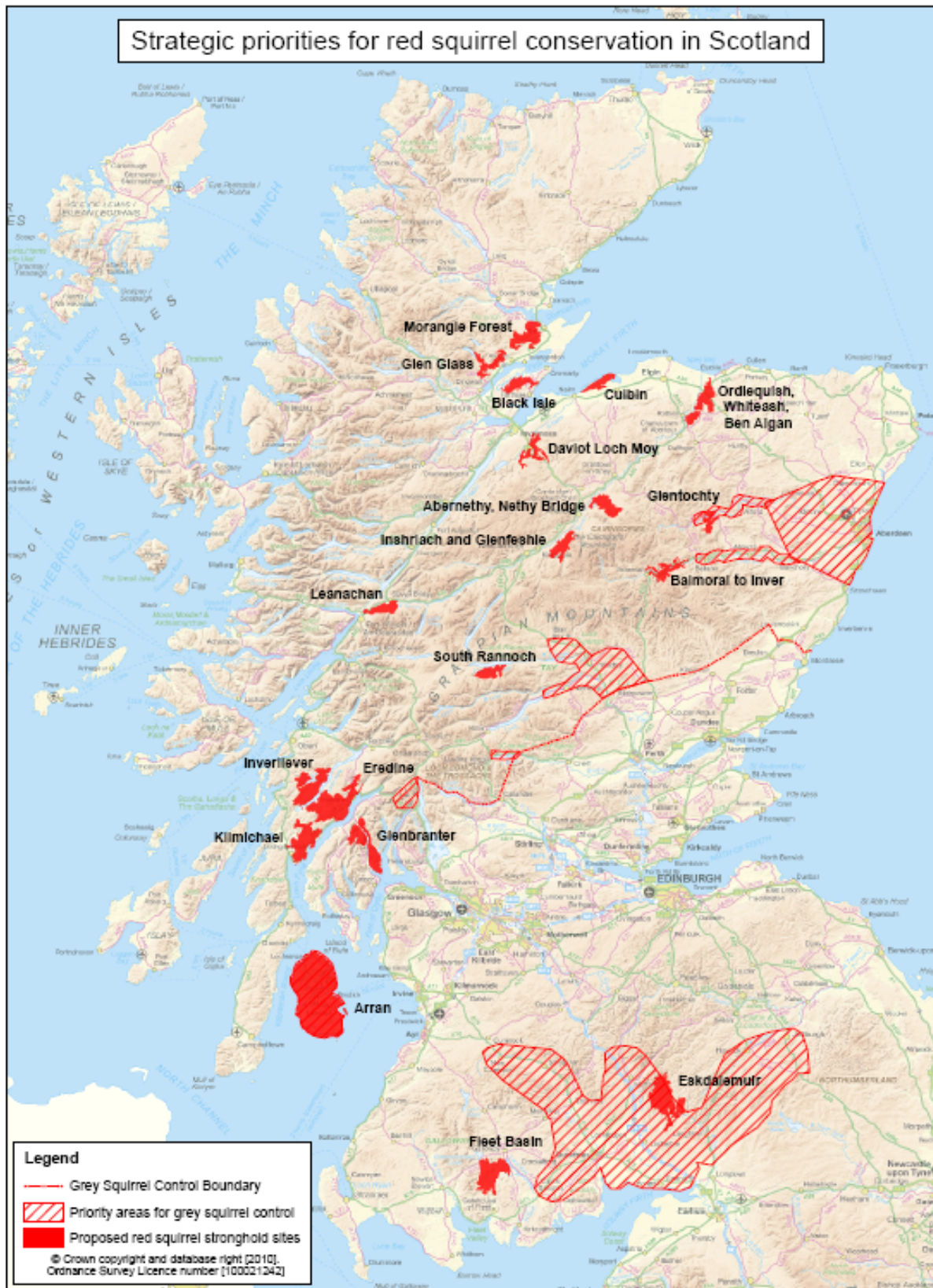
The key points of the programme are as follows:

1. PKRSG in conjunction with the British Association for Shooting & Conservation (BASC) Scotland and SSRS will accredit a team of Volunteer Controllers (VCs) to operate the programme on PKC managed land
 2. The programme will be conducted under the direction of the SSRS project's Standard Operating Procedures for Grey Squirrel Control (2009) which incorporates the BASC code of practice on air rifles¹¹. Refer to Appendix 2 for an image showing a correctly prepared and set live capture trap in accordance with the Operating Procedures
 3. All VCs will be registered and operate under PKRSG's public liability insurance (cover up to £5 million) which includes £100,000 Libel & Slander Cover and Personal Accident Cover of £20,000 capital / £200 per weekly benefit (as provided for by Tennyson Insurance and underwritten by Zurich).
 4. No grey squirrel dispatch by VCs will take place on PKC managed land. Rather trapped animals will be transported a short distance by vehicle (still securely protected within the live capture trap) to a nearby private residence of a PKRSG member/supporter and dispatched without undue haste
 5. PKRSG committee members and others will make themselves available to PKC with regard to a series of public awareness events such as deemed appropriate by PKC
 6. There will be null cost to PKC with regard to the points previously outlined. It is expected that PKC will secure appropriate funding for the live capture traps. None of the PKRSG activities listed above carry a cost for PKC
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Number of pages in this document - 4

¹¹ <http://www.basc.org.uk/en/shooting/airgunning/air-rifles.cfm>

Map of Strategic Priority Areas



Grey squirrel control will aim to eliminate any populations to the north of this line and prevent new populations from becoming established.
The extent of the grey squirrel control area is as published in the draft Grey Squirrel Control Strategy (SNH, 2010) and is subject to review over time.

