



Conrad, Will and Marion squirrel spotting with Prince Harry near Haydon Bridge February 2015

## 2015 summary report



In addition to our partners, RSNE 2015 supporters included:



GARFIELD WESTON



Our 650 "[Friends of the Red Squirrel](#)"



## Introduction

2015 was the fourth full year of the Red Squirrels Northern England programme. Highlights included another full squirrel range monitoring survey, a very large grey squirrel management programme, a Royal visit and further contributions to the creation of a UK-scale red squirrel conservation project.

My team and I are hugely indebted to our partners, funders, Advisory Group and wider supporters for all the energy, inspiration and advice you provide.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'NPM', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

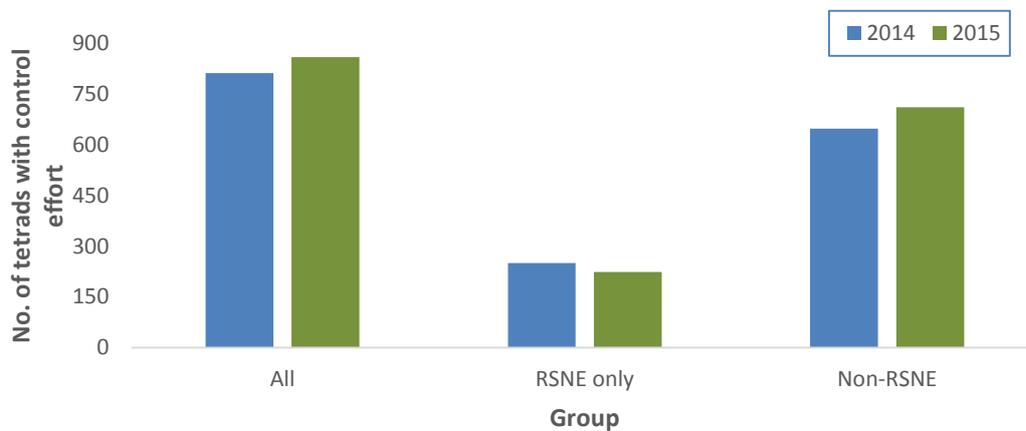
Nick Mason  
RSNE Project Manager

## Outcome 1 Conserving reds through grey squirrel control

Red conservation activity grew again in 2015 for the fourth consecutive year, with a record geographical area across northern England covered as shown figure 1 below. This effort was shared between 819 individuals, with involvement from a host of local community groups, organisations and land management businesses.

This expansion is shown in the geographical footprint of reported conservation effort increasing by 5% on 2014, with activity recorded in 859 tetrads (4km<sup>2</sup> landscape units).

*Fig 1. Summary conservation effort data for 2014 & 2015*



A total of 118,767 grey squirrel “trap/shoot days” were documented 2015, a 1% reduction on 2014. The RSNE Ranger team was responsible for 33% of this recorded effort with the work of other parties growing again. Overall, the records document 20,770 grey squirrel kills in red squirrel range, a 33% increase on 2014. These records confirm what most of our community felt was a “peak” year for grey squirrels, potentially driven by another large deciduous tree food crop and typical winter weather.

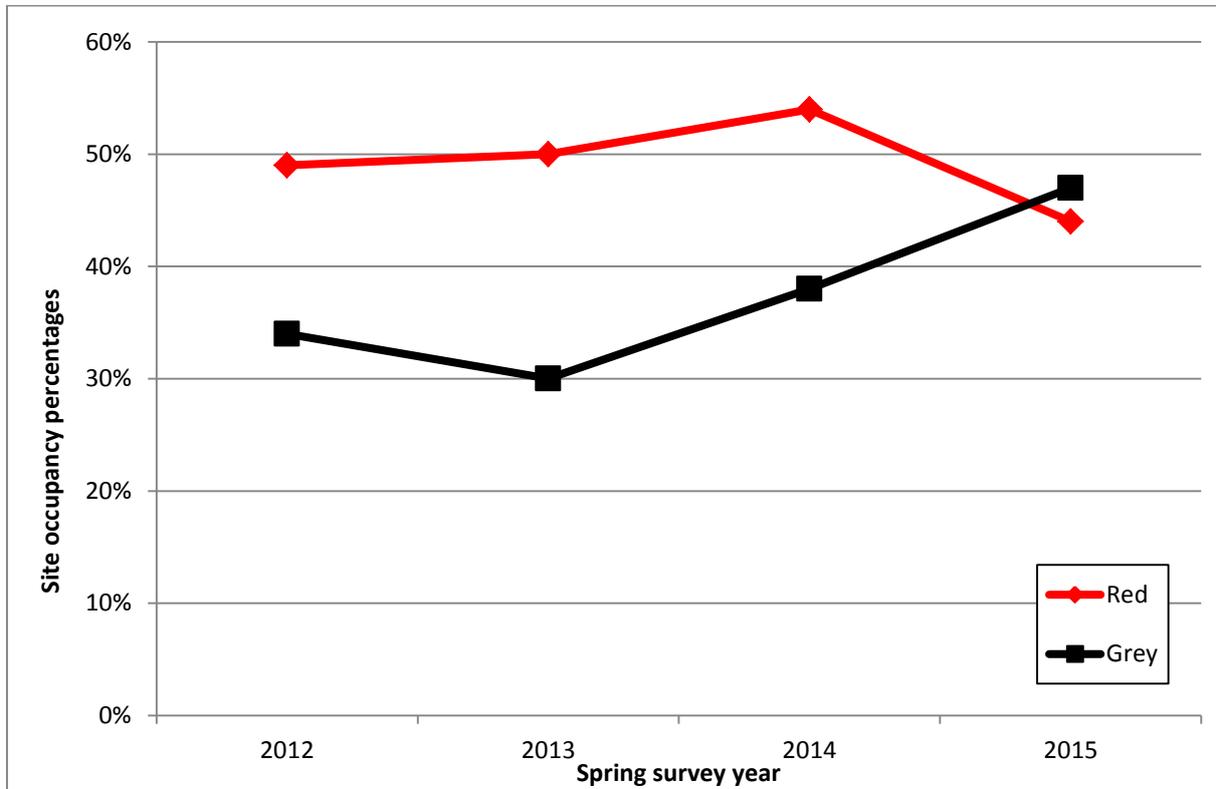
## Outcome 2 Monitoring and Data Management

Following two consecutive years of red squirrel range expansion, [our systematic monitoring programme in 2015](#) documented a decline in the number of sites where they were detected for the first time since the RSNE project started in 2012. Red squirrels were found in 44% of the 290 sites surveyed between March and May, down from 53% in 2014. Grey squirrels were found in 47% of survey sites, up from 38% in 2014.

These results reflect the experiences of staff and hundreds of community volunteers working in woodlands across northern England during 2015 and we suspect that a second consecutive mild winter and bumper wild food crops have given grey squirrels a temporary advantage over our native reds.

The monitoring continues to inform site specific work, while enabling year on year tracking of trends in abundance of the two squirrel species, as shown below.

Fig. 2. Red and grey squirrel site occupancy for all spring surveys 2012-2015. Site occupancy is shown as a percentage of the total number of surveys completed each year.

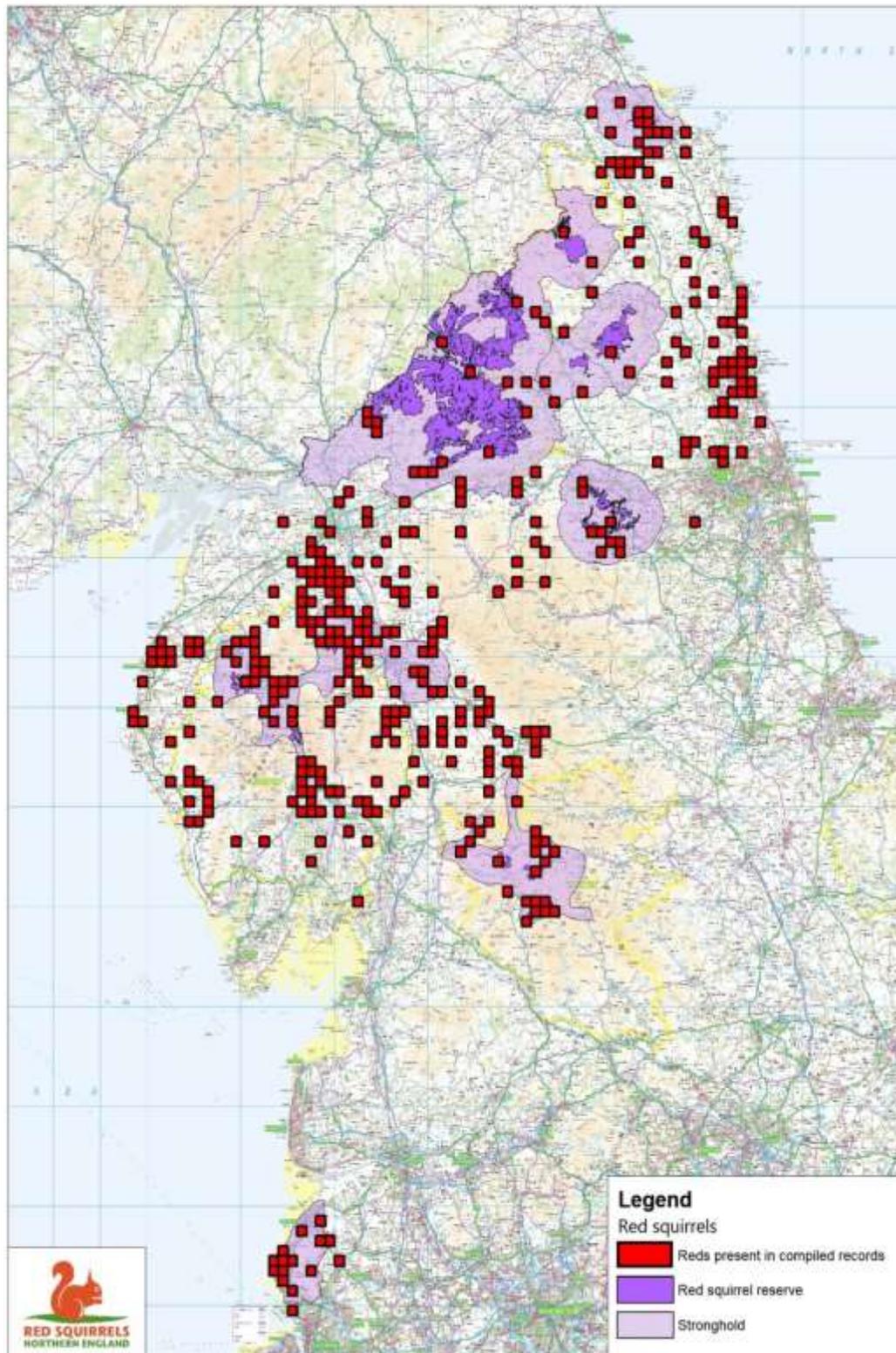


2015 also saw our highest level of community involvement in range monitoring. 209 of the 290 surveys (72%) were carried out by volunteers from across northern England.

The total red squirrel range documented by our monitoring work is shown overleaf in map 1.

Support from Northumberland National Park's Sustainable Development Fund and the National Trust enabled us to support a Newcastle University PhD studentship titled "*The impact of grey squirrel control and timber harvesting on the red squirrel*", with Deborah Brady concluding her detailed fieldwork at Rothley in Northumberland by the year end and beginning the lengthy process of data analysis.

Map 1 – Spring 2015 red squirrel range summary, based on the results of the standardised monitoring and all other records from the same time period. Presence is represented at a tetrad (2x2km square) level



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### Outcome 3 Partnership working and sharing best practice.

Continued emphasis has been given to relationship building and sharing progress in 2015. Some of the highlights are given below:

- Helping Prince Harry meet red squirrel conservation activists and learn more about our programme on a visit to Haydon Bridge and Frankham organised through NWT's patron Conrad Dickinson.
- Running two dissemination events for 100 participants in our monitoring programme at Woodhorn Museum and the Shap Wells Hotel, giving them a chance to discuss findings, debate refinements to methodologies and learn new skills.
- Our Facebook/Twitter community continues to grow (5000 followers/friends), regularly providing new volunteers and supporters. Our biannual *Friends* newsletter is also now being circulated to 1000 project supporters and our e-newsletter *the Red Report* to over 2000 contacts every two months.
- Assisting several landowner applications to the new Countryside Stewardship scheme, with red squirrels as a primary conservation feature.
- Working alongside partners to finish the development of *Red Squirrels United*, a collaborative UK conservation initiative scheduled to begin in summer 2016.
- Supporting the development of Aberdeen University's PhD studentship seeking to build collective understanding and awareness regarding the potential role of pine marten in red squirrel conservation in the UK.



Simon, Julie and Mike watching red squirrels at the Shap dissemination event in October 2015.