

## HOW I BECAME A SQUIRREL VOLUNTEER

It was a beautiful summer's day as I strolled through the wood not far from Belford. Suddenly, on the path in front of me I spotted a red squirrel foraging. Its colours were beautiful. It looked plump, healthy and well-fed and had a bright orange-red coat. Of course, it didn't stay around long when it spotted me but swiftly scampered off into nearby bushes. However, something about its unexpected appearance touched me and I remembered the business card I had picked up from a Red Squirrel Conservation Group's stand at an agricultural show some years back. I had kept the card, thinking, this is something I should get involved in, but it never seemed the right time for this retired person to take on yet another commitment. For some reason on this occasion it was different. The sighting must have given me the impetus I needed.

When I arrived home I found the card and contacted the person named. I was put in touch with my nearest group, Save Our Squirrels Berwick Group, and received a welcoming email message inviting me to join other interested people on a walk in Kyloe Woods for a taste of squirrel monitoring. We checked the feeding-boxes and tubes in the wood for squirrel hairs and filled up empty ones. We learnt to recognise nibbled pine cones and look for dreys. I was amazed to learn that squirrels learn to lift the lid of the box to access the nuts. I hadn't realised they were so intelligent! It did not take me long to get hooked!

I have been checking feeders in my allocated wood for a few months now. I was lucky enough to be given a wood within walking distance of my house. I go every 2 or 3 weeks, and I still feel the thrill of anticipation as I approach an empty feeding-box and lift the lid to check if any hairs have been left on the sticky strip placed where the squirrel will brush against it as it takes the hazel nuts. That's how we know if reds are around. I record this and pass the data on to our Group Co-ordinator who keeps a record of results.

You might be surprised to know how many volunteers take part in this exercise in our area. But because this part of North Northumberland has so many habitats frequented by reds and more recently increasingly by greys we need many more. **If you like being outdoors, walking amongst trees and enjoy contributing to a common cause please think about becoming a Squirrel Volunteer. I wish I had started years ago!**

*To report a sighting or to become a volunteer contact [john.rae@berwickredsquirrelgroup.org](mailto:john.rae@berwickredsquirrelgroup.org) or Heather Tel 0753 607 6131*