



WIGHT SQUIRREL PROJECT

The Isle of Wight red squirrel conservation group

Founded 1993

Spring 2024

RED SQUIRREL NUMBERS APPEAR STABLE

Sightings are steady and, in spite of the wet winter, the squirrels appear to be holding their own. So far this year, only one report of a drey blown from a tree has been reported, although I suspect there were more.

Kittens were born in February as usual and a rise in road kills, sadly, is on queue. An unusual sighting of a squirrel dispersing through Newport town centre was spotted at the beginning of April 2024.



BOOKS

There is now a selection of books for all ages and degrees of interest in red squirrels. A new children's book called 'Ginger finds a new home' by Helen Butler MBE BSc and is aimed at very young children. Graphic artist Kate Northover did the illustrations and design. The story is based on the true life happenings of red squirrels and there are 12 facts, with pictures, after the story.



For older children and young at heart adults, the original story has been reprinted and upgraded. Want to learn quickly? Then the pocketbook '200 fascinating facts about red squirrels' is the one for you.



For the serious red squirrel enthusiast, there is the huge book giving 30 years of red squirrel work. This includes data and post mortem details and pictures, so is not for the faint-hearted. As part of our charitable giving, universities and colleges can apply for a free copy by contacting wightsquirrels@hotmail.com.



The books are distributed in shops around the Island by WJ Nigh & Sons Ltd.

VOLUNTEER TROPHY HOLDER

Debbie Hart is a very good fundraiser and has been a stalwart at the shows.

Her garden is a haven for numerous red squirrels and, being a keen photographer, Debbie contributes to our calendar and other publications.

I'm sure some of you have met Debbie at shows and if you buy online auctions goods, picked the items up from her.



CITIZEN SCIENCE STATISTICS 2023

The total number of sightings from the general public during 2023 is 1568 and that does not include Peter Dugher's reports or the woodland monitoring. This is down on last year. Monitoring is very important, so please report any squirrels you see on the Isle of Wight to Wight Squirrel Project. The QR code takes you to the online form or use the link: <http://www.wightsquirrels.co.uk/Red-Squirrel-Sightings.html>



RED SQUIRRELS IN THE GARDEN SURVEY

If you are lucky enough to have red squirrels in your garden, would you help out PhD student, Alyson, by filling in her questionnaire please. Alyson is working out how many squirrels Isle of Wight habitat can hold, based on food supply. As there is so much garden feeding, it will obviously influence the result, although of course, there are hazards such as pet kills, disease, netting and water butts, so there is a downside.

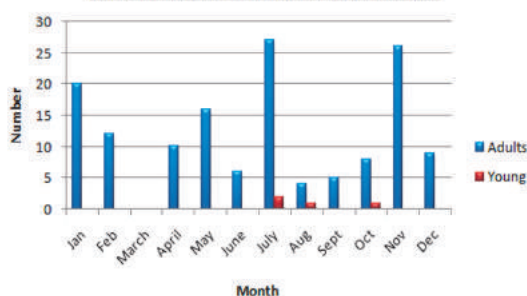
This is the direct link to the IoW red squirrel feeding survey:

<https://bournemouth.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/iow-redsquirrel-feeding-survey>



Or this QR code takes you straight to the form

Sally Wiltshire Whitwell Sightings 2023



REGULAR GARDEN SIGHTINGS

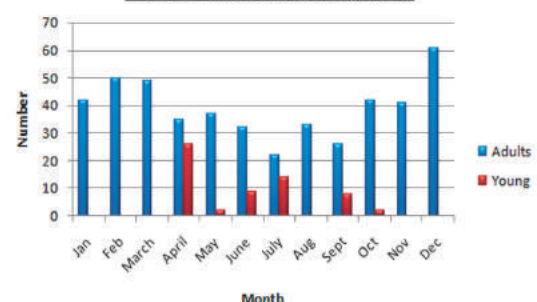
The Whitwell sightings are submitted via the app, whilst the Borthwood sightings are monthly on a spreadsheet. The Seaview sightings are submitted annually on an Excel sheet with the same heading as the main database.

If you would like to participate and want advice how to present your sightings, please contact Helen: wightsquirrels@hotmail.com

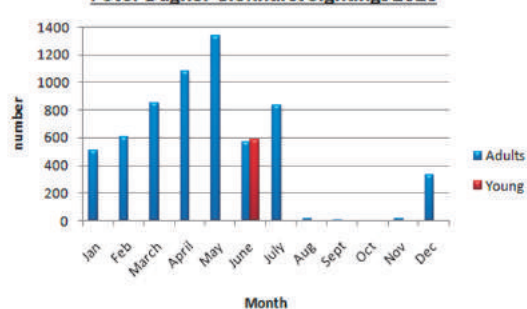
These comparisons from different areas of the Island all paint a picture and tally with other reports gathered by different methods.

How long the observer is watching does make some difference of course but overall it does reflect squirrel numbers in different areas. Seaview squirrels are literally garden squirrels as there are no sizeable woods nearby. Borthwood is the reverse of course!

J.Wilson Seaview Sightings 2023



Peter Dugher Glenhurst Sightings 2023



Feeding red squirrels does help them survive in late spring and early summer and if the autumn glut is poor.

Please feed a healthy diet, so not too many peanuts!! There is advice on the website: www.wightsquirrels.co.uk

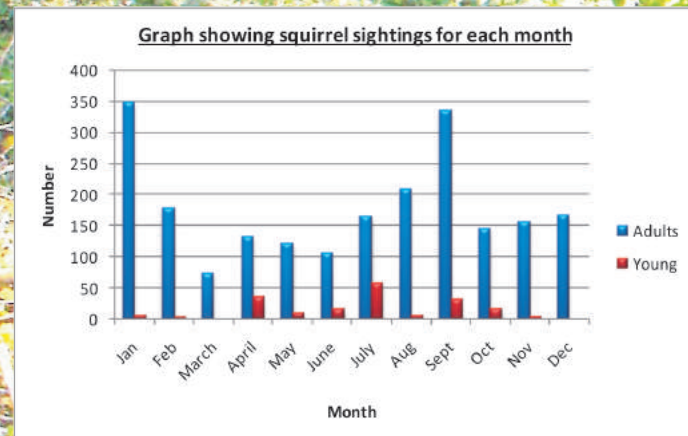
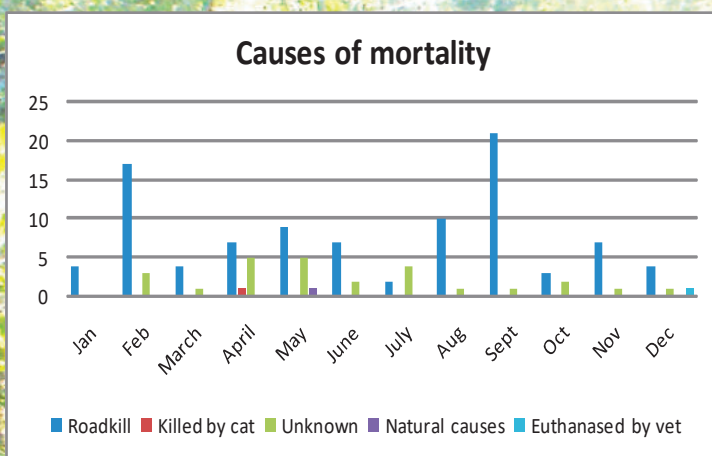


POSTMORTEMS

I'm giving this a rest. After 800 examinations I think it's deserved! Also, getting samples tested is seemingly impossible now, unless there is a particular study underway. Do keep reporting deaths for the records please.

Without having the bodies, cause of death cannot be ascertained unless it's obvious to the person reporting it. Road kills and witnessed kills, such as cat, dog or bird are easy enough but otherwise it's unknown or natural causes.

We do have sick squirrels in and they are taken to the vet, so there is a better chance of diagnosis. Sadly, few make it. If a red squirrel is catchable it is really sick and some die just with the stress of handling. The rules have changed and we must take animals to a vet to get any medication. This does make helping the squirrel much slower and therefore the outcome less likely to be successful, even if there is a chance of survival.



The total number of squirrel fatalities reported was 124, including those brought in sick. This is lower than normal. Of course not all road kills are reported and in 2023 it was an unusually low number at only 95. If you do see a dead squirrel, please report it! September is a normal time for road kills to peak but, oddly, February is an earlier than usual peak.

Normally there would be dots maps to show locations but these haven't worked out as QGIS has updated and I haven't got to grips with the changes. If this can be sorted out, any maps will be in the next bulletin.

The number of reports overall were down, so are people getting fed up with red squirrels or should we look for another way to report them? What would encourage you to report seeing a red squirrel on the Isle of Wight?

There is an app, an online form, email or phone message and we do take sightings at shows. Are we taking our red squirrels for granted on the Isle of Wight? I hope not! The Island is a national stronghold for red squirrels and it would be disastrous for the species if we did not look after them and, where possible, their habitat.



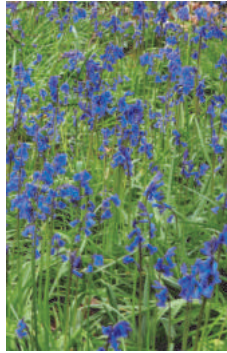
The updated Isle of Wight Red Squirrel Strategy was launched in 2023 and a copy is attached to Wight Squirrel Project website.

There are bad planning applications that want to destroy habitat and there is little protection for woods, which is bad news. Perhaps the Local Nature Reserve Strategy and the tree warden scheme will help improve habitat protection in the future.

Wight Squirrel Project do comment on planning applications that adversely affect red squirrel habitat. There is pdf attached to the website which gives tips on replying to planning applications affecting woodland habitat, corridors and red squirrels.

BLUEBELL DAY 2024

April 28th is the date for your diary. It is in privately owned Knighton East Wood, courtesy of Nicky Eaton. The gate opens at 10.30am and last entry is 3pm with the gate closing at 3.30pm



There will be refreshments and some stalls. **BUT** we are **CASH ONLY!** Entry is £3 per adult and children free. Dogs on a lead are welcome. If you want to stock up on plants, Haylands Farm are coming along this year.

SHOP

Have a look at the red squirrel display in the shop window in Pyle Street, Newport, which will be there until a new tenant takes on the premises. Thank you to Beth for putting up the display.

Bernie has made another mascot red squirrel and it looks very like the squirrel in Wight Squirrel Project logo. This was not intentional! The IOW Red Squirrel Trust is running a naming competition, so watch out for the details.



RAT POISON

The IW Red squirrel Forum discussed the problem of rat poison and we had two very good speakers. I also wrote to Lord Beynon again as there are loopholes in the rules concerning the use of poison.

Buying online is an obvious loophole and I heard of an Isle of Wight firm telling a customer not to bother buying a proper bait box and just throw the poison on the ground!! I also saw an unprotected box outside a supermarket, where squirrels pass, so much needs to be done!

As I am not collecting bodies anymore, there are no statistics re death by rat poison.

TREE WARDENS

There is a possibility the tree warden scheme will be revived and I am consulting with the Parish Councils and the IW tree Officer, Jerry Willis.



I'm not entirely sure what it entails yet but when I do know, I'll send out a bulletin. The scheme will be discussed at the IW Red Squirrel Forum in June.

2025 CALENDAR

WJ Nigh & Sons are producing the calendar this year, so it will be available in shops around the Island.

There will be copies for the 'regulars' and 'Friends of the Red Squirrel' members at their usual discounted price. Watch out for us at shows this year too.



WIGHT SQUIRREL PROJECT CONTACT DETAILS

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Wight Squirrel Project is run entirely by volunteers and is self-funding

Please note, we are giving up the PO Box from February 2025 as it is very expensive and deliveries are few and far between. An alternative will be found by the end of February 2025.