



Marlyn Glen

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speech in the Scottish Parliament

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I, too, congratulate Murdo Fraser on securing the debate.

As we can see, lots of people like red and grey squirrels.

As we have heard, the problem is that the two species cannot live together.

Grey squirrels, which were introduced to Scotland from America more than a century ago, are causing the endangered red squirrels to disappear slowly.

It is our responsibility to prevent that from happening.

Conservation and land management are not easy subjects.

Some people are upset by talk of culling, whether we are discussing deer, hedgehogs or squirrels

However, if action is not taken the red squirrel will disappear from our woods altogether, so I support Murdo Fraser's call for action.

Although it is unlikely that the minister will announce new funding for research into immunocontraception,

I urge him to take action—I encourage him to surprise us with an announcement on funding, too.

My interest in the subject is a result of the existence of a colony of red squirrels in Camperdown park and its surroundings, in the city of Dundee.

Dundee boasts that it is the best city in Britain for people who want to see red squirrels; in fact, it is the

only city in Britain that is lucky enough to have a population of red squirrels.

Red squirrels can be seen in Camperdown park, Templeton Woods, Caird park and other wooded areas in the city.

It is well documented that the most serious threat to red squirrels is the ever-expanding population of grey squirrels, with the attendant risk of squirrel pox, which is fatal to red but not grey squirrels, as members have said.

Grey squirrel control has historically been done by landowners, farmers and gamekeepers.

Control must continue alongside positive measures to encourage reds.

The Dundee red squirrel project aims to protect and enhance the population of red squirrels in the area.

It is highly successful and seeks to protect red squirrels in Dundee from the takeover of their habitats and food supplies by grey squirrels from eastern Angus, by encouraging local people to record sightings.

With that aim, a tailored public awareness campaign—meet the neighbours—was launched throughout Tayside, to increase awareness of issues to do with conservation of the Scottish red squirrel population.

Local schools, nurseries and young people's groups are undertaking red squirrel projects.

All libraries in Tayside, including mobile libraries, have information and free postcards, and displays are touring all libraries in the region.

The project has a wonderful, user-friendly website at <http://www.dundeeredredsquirrels.co.uk>, which I encourage members to look at.

Concerted effort is required on the main sources of incursion by greys, so that we can at least stem their further spread into highland Scotland via the Tay valley and northern Angus.

The SNH strategy promotes land use and forestation that supports diverse ages, classes and species of tree.

Grey squirrels prefer broad-leaved trees, but restricting the planting of such trees would have an impact on biodiversity in other areas.

We need to control grey squirrels, but we need evidence that establishes the right method of doing so.

That requires properly funded research.

It has been estimated that a programme of research would cost approximately £3 million over four years.

I encourage the minister to discuss with SNH the possibility of taking such positive action to conserve an endangered species.

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WEBSITE LINK

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