



Red Squirrels of Bute

A progress report

10 January 2023

This evening:

1. Introduction to the red squirrel.
2. Squirrels in Bute.
3. Explain how the Red Squirrel Project started.
4. Tell you what we've been doing.
5. The results so far.
6. Web site.
7. Options for the future.
8. Discussion – Get your questions and comments ready!



Objective

Our objective is to establish thriving populations of red squirrels in all suitable areas of the Isle of Bute.



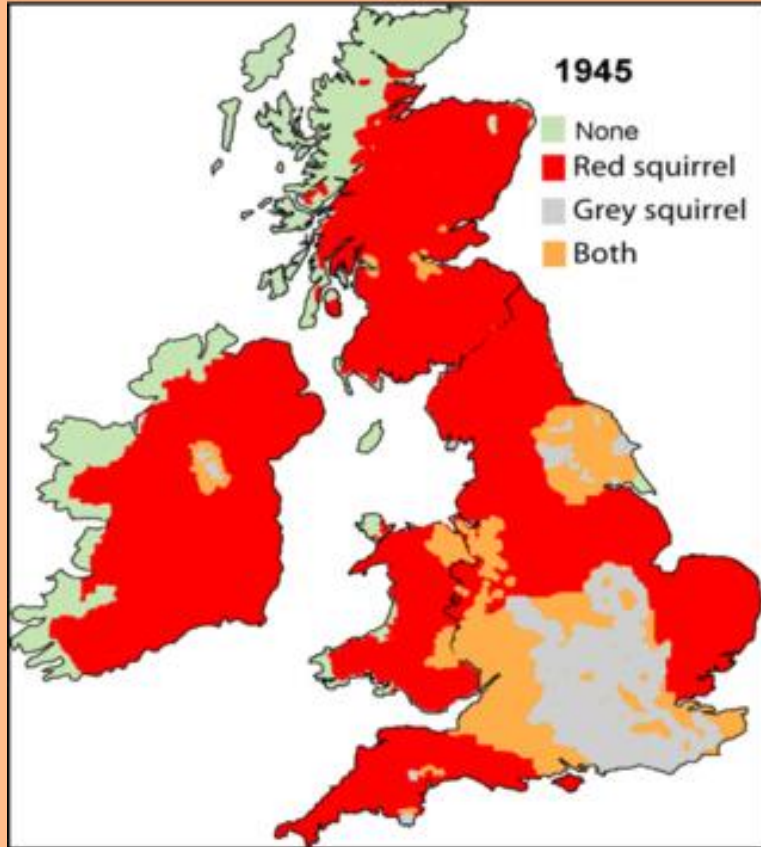
Introduction to the Red Squirrel

The Red Squirrel

- Been in the UK since 8,000 BCE (grey squirrels only since 1890)
- Average lifespan of about 6 years
- Diet consists of hazelnuts, cones, shoots and berries
- 40 days to have a kitten and they have an average litter size of 3
- Build multiple nests called dreys
- Don't hibernate over winter

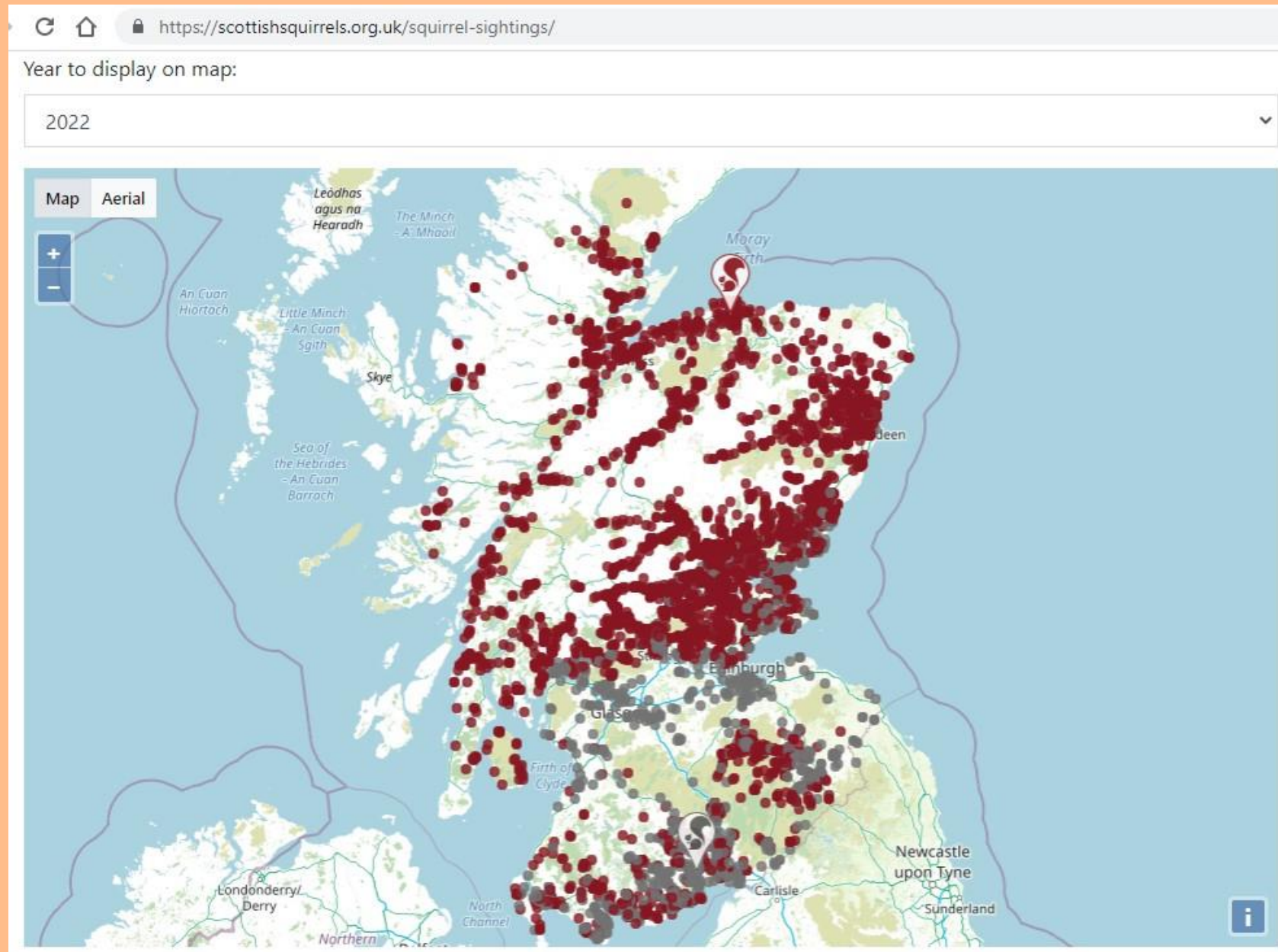


Reds vs Greys



Red and grey squirrel distribution in the British Isles in 1945 and 2010.
Copyright Craig Shuttleworth/RSST

Distribution of red and grey squirrels in Scotland



Distribution of red and grey squirrels around Bute



Squirrels on Bute

Squirrels on Bute

Common questions:

- How many red squirrels are there on Bute?
- Are there any grey squirrels?
- How did they get here?
- Will I have red squirrels in my garden?
- Is it true that you start feeding them, then stop?
- Why don't we see them?



Measures of abundance

The A.C.F.O.R. scale:

A – Abundant

C – Common

F – Frequent

O – Occasional

R – Rare

Squirrels on Bute

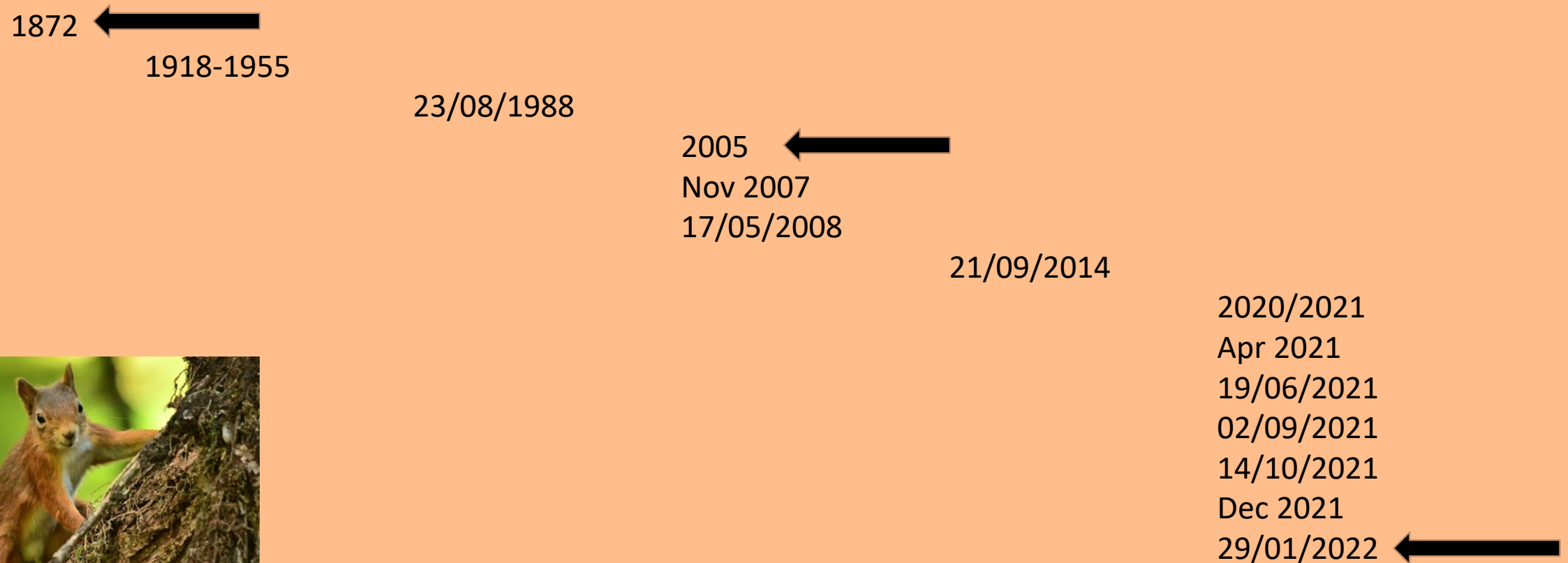
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How the Bute Red Squirrel Project started

There have been sightings of squirrels:



How the Bute Red Squirrel Project started

29 January 2022 – a significant date.

John Williams photographs a red squirrel in Rhubodach Forest



How the Bute Red Squirrel Project started

Various separate aspects came together in January 2022:

- Malcolm Newdick's first six-month stay on Bute in 2021 – brought a squirrel feeder on the assumption that there were squirrels here... Moved here in December 2021.
- Encouragement from Ray Eddie and Billy Shields
- George Morgan – interest and thoughts about reintroductions.
- Samuel Lindsay, ecologist from Aberdeen University, started work with Bute Community Forest.
- John Williams – acting on a sighting in Rhubodach Forest.



How the Bute Red Squirrel Project started

Thank you to:

- Museum & Natural History Society for their encouragement, financial support and loan of trail cameras
- Friends of the Museum for their offer of financial support.
- Ark Wildlife for a generous discount on squirrel feeders and food



And a special thank you to John Williams for the use of his photographs



Where are they?

The first step is to find out which areas of woodland have squirrels.



What we have been doing in 2022

Possible methods:

- Ask people to look for field signs – dreys, chewed cones etc
- Walk transects searching for squirrels in trees and searching for field signs.
- Use feeders to lure squirrels in and trail cameras to capture the evidence.

What we have been doing in 2022

Plan:

- Move from north to south through major blocks of woodland.
- Place feeders at roughly 1 or 2 per kilometre square. Squirrel density could be 1 per hectare in perfect conditions, but in low quality plantation woodland it could be 0.06 per hectare (ie 6 per sq km).
- How long do you wait before giving up? The standard time from other studies was six weeks, so we adopted that.
- We started with four feeders. When we had a good sighting in Lenihuline Woods we expanded to eight feeders.



Who has been doing all the work in 2022?

We have a great team of people monitoring the feeders:

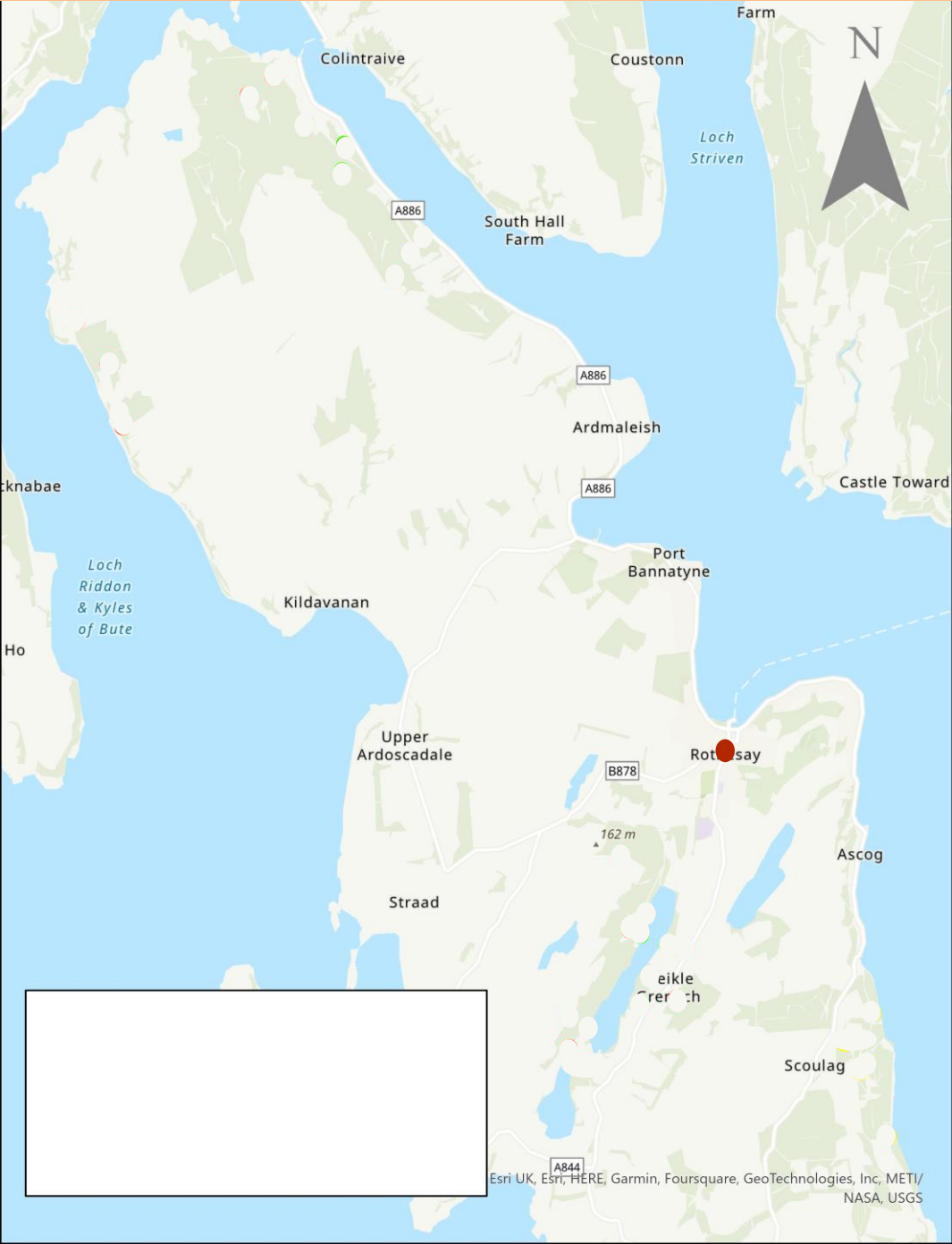
- Barbara Rimmington and fellow ramblers
- Liz McKirdy
- Jackie and Ray Eddie
- George Morgan and Samuel Lindsay



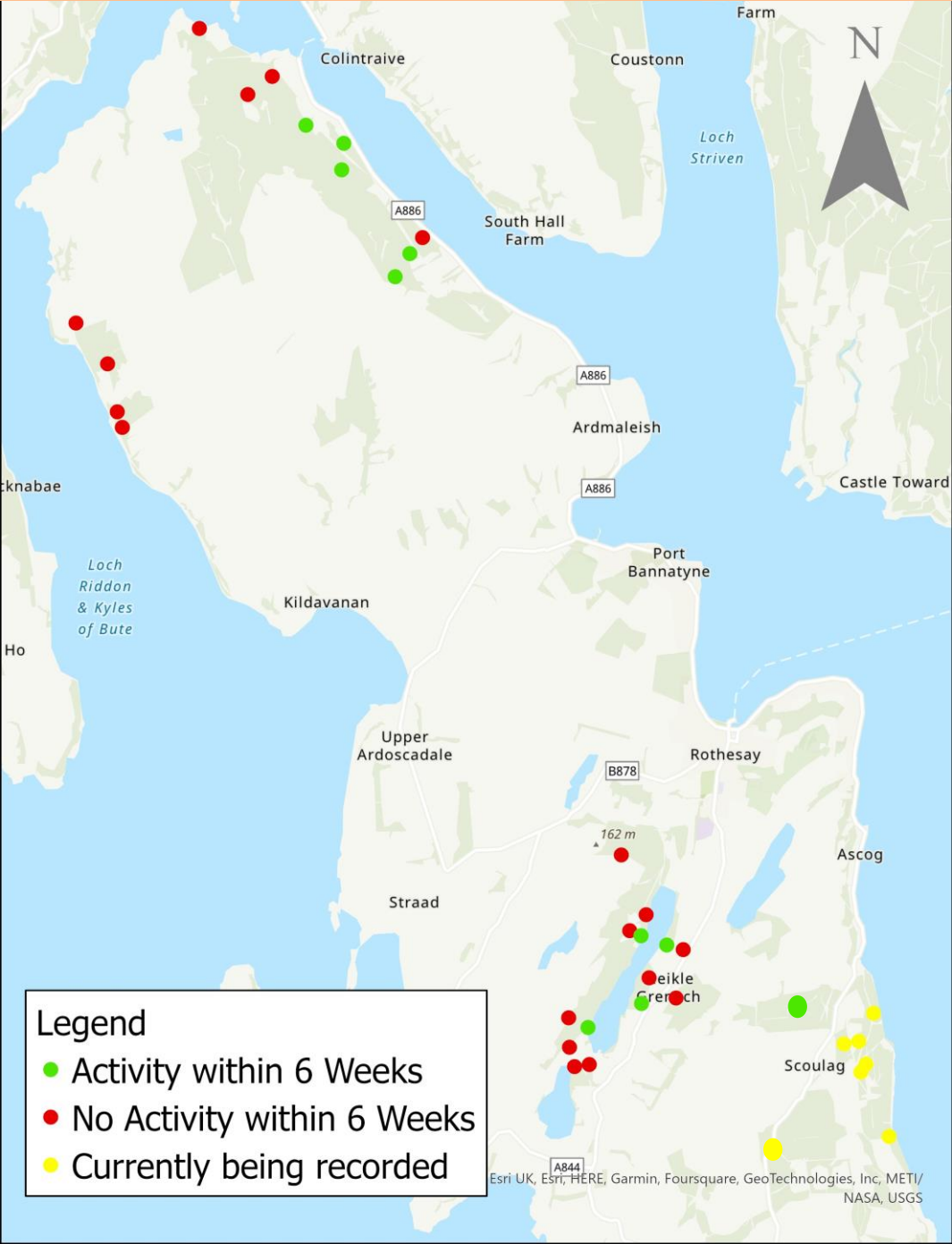
Results

February to December 2022

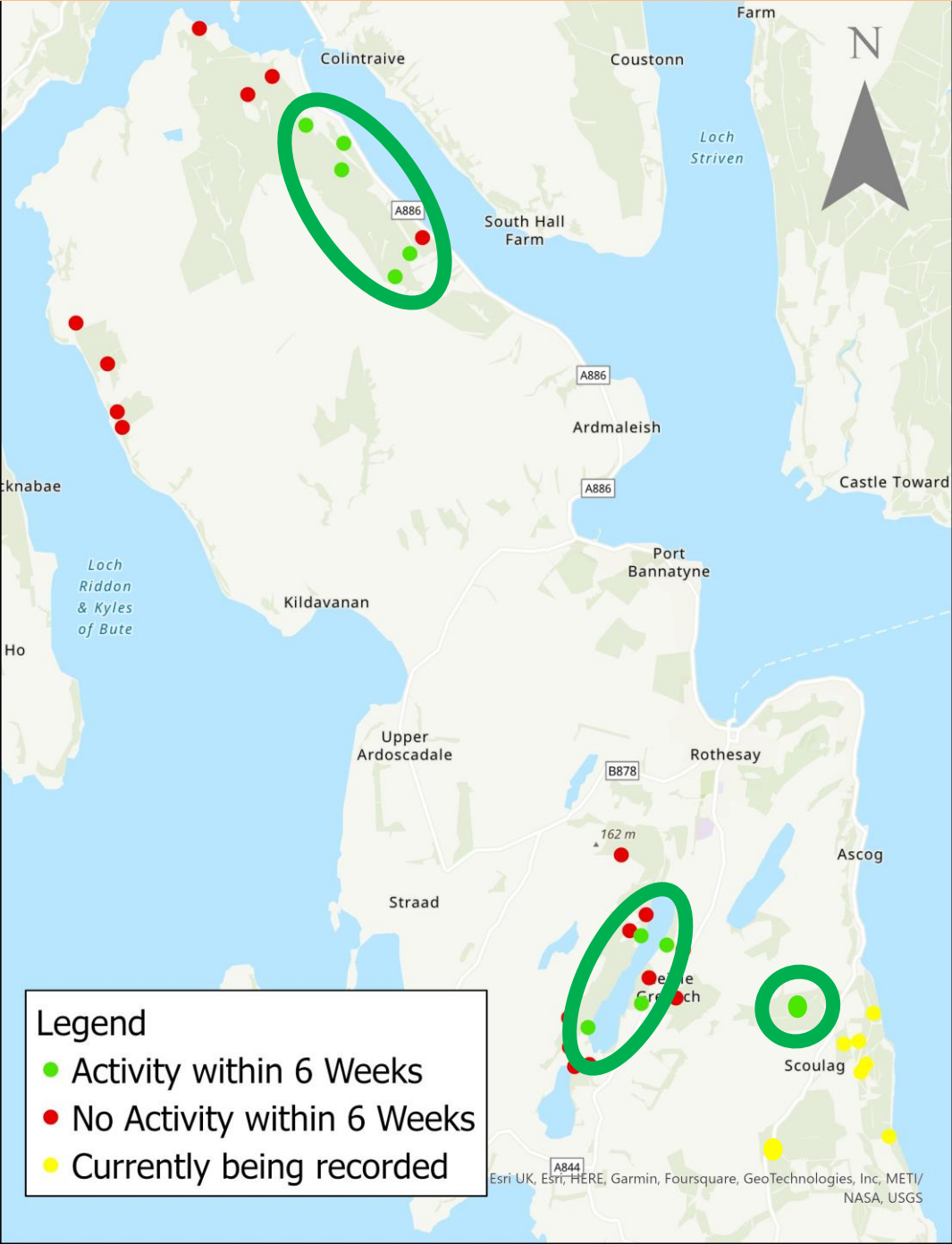
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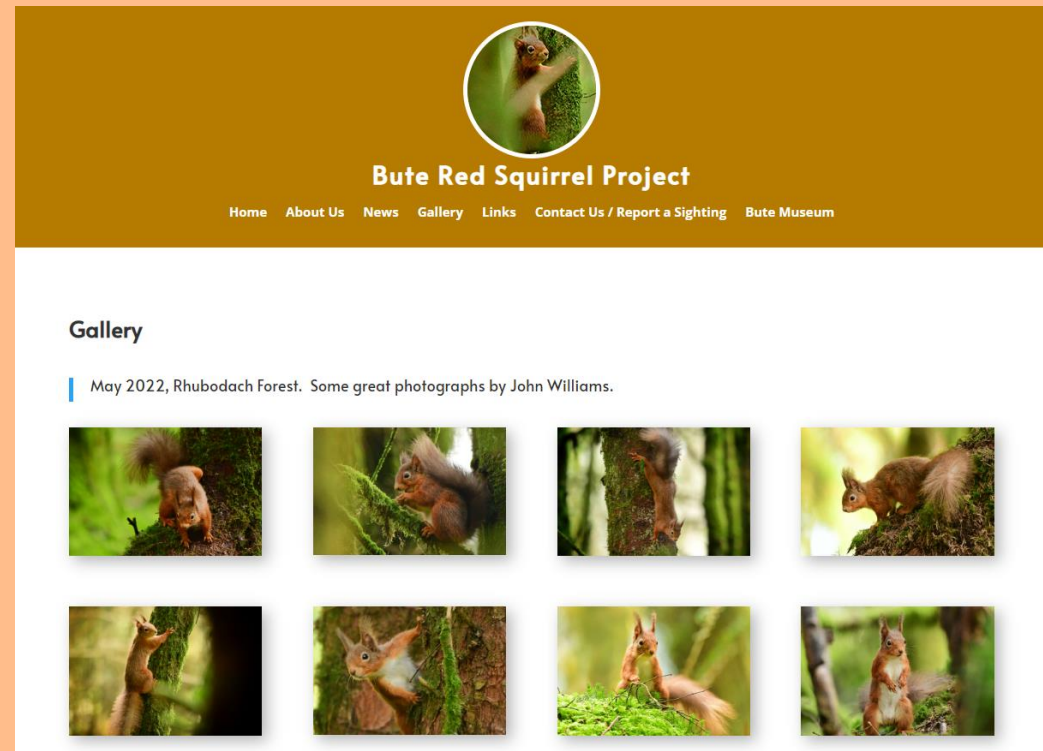


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The Red Squirrel Project website

<https://www.budemuseum.org.uk/buteredsquirrelproject>



Please report your sightings!



Bute Red Squirrel Project

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Contact us/Report a sighting



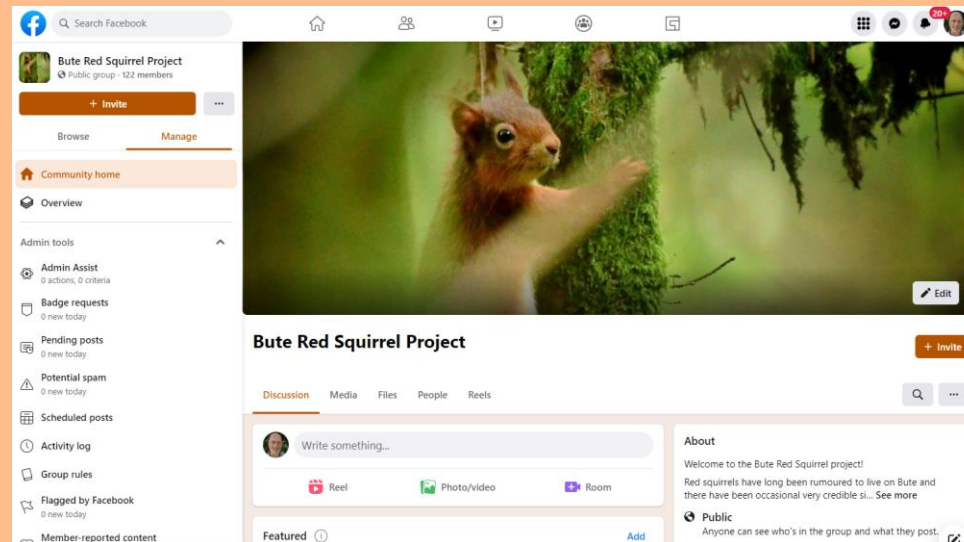
1. We are always delighted to receive sightings from visitors and residents alike. If you have any photographs to go with your sightings, please send them to buteredsquirrel@gmail.com



Photo by Laura McFarlane

Get involved!

Join our Facebook group for the latest news, videos, requests for volunteers etc



If you'd like to be part of the Project committee email buteredsqurrel@gmail.com

The future

Things to keep in mind

- Bute is a small island
- The red squirrel population will always be small & isolated
- Small, isolated populations are always vulnerable



What's holding them back?

Possible limiting factors:

- Fragmented habitat
- Limited food supply
- Genetic isolation



Next steps

Once we have completed the work with feeders:

- Write a summary of our results.
- Get professional conservation advice from partner organisations.
- Encourage university projects to answer some of the more technical questions (eg diet, genetics).

Possible short term actions

- Supplementary feeding for the squirrels and for public engagement.
- Provide nest boxes to aid dispersal and breeding.

Possible long term actions

- Improve diversity of tree species.
- Reduce habitat fragmentation by creating woodland corridors.
- Reinforcement of the squirrel population.

Discussion

Opinions

Ideas

Thoughts

Suggestions

