

Red Squirrels showing resistance to squirrelpox

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A study by the University of Liverpool has found that the red squirrel population along the Sefton coastline appears to be recovering from a serious outbreak of squirrelpox in 2008.

Researchers from the University, in collaboration with the Lancashire Wildlife Trust, have been monitoring the red squirrel population at the Seaforth Coastal reserve since the outbreak which resulted in an 85% fall in the red squirrel population.

Squirrel pox is a potentially fatal disease which affects red squirrel populations in some areas and is thought that to be a significant factor in the decline of the red squirrel population in the UK. The virus is often carried by grey squirrels from North America, which rarely die from the disease as their population has developed immunity having been exposed to the virus for many years.

Dr Julian Chantrey, from the University's Institute of Integrative Biology, said: "We have had a unique opportunity to study the dynamics of the squirrelpox disease. So far, our findings indicate that they are recovering from the disease which affected them so severely in 2008.

"There are even indications that a few of the surviving squirrels appear to have antibody to the virus, which would suggest that they have recovered from infection in the past. More recently, we have identified a red squirrel that recovered naturally from squirrelpox and was released back into the population. However, at this stage, there is insufficient evidence to say whether there is significant resistance in the population as a whole to prevent another pox outbreak."

Andrew Brockbank, Countryside Manager for the National Trust in Formby, said: "Red squirrels would feature on many people's list of favourite British wildlife and it's been a huge relief to see the numbers recovering at Formby in the last five years after the 2007/8 crash.

"Whether [red squirrels](#) have any long term immunity or not remains to be seen. But the recovery of the population and the findings of the research give us hope that red squirrels have a better chance of survival at Formby than we had thought possible just a few years ago."

Provided by University of Liverpool

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