

‘Maureen Hutchison (VR, 25 May 2019, p655) questions the role of squirrelpox in the decline of red squirrels (*Sciurus vulgaris*). There is a strong body of scientific evidence firmly establishing a combination of squirrelpox disease outbreaks and competition with grey squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*) as the cause of decline of red squirrels in mainland England, Scotland and Wales. A series of serological, experimental, spatial and temporal epidemiological, translocation and modelling studies has shown that grey squirrels are the reservoir for the squirrelpox virus (SQPV) and that the rate of decline of red squirrel populations is estimated to be 17-25 times higher where SQPV is present in grey squirrel populations compared with populations where SQPV is absent (Carroll et al 2009; Rushton et al 2006; Sainsbury et al 2008; Sainsbury et al 2000; Tompkins et al 2002). There is a reduction in the recruitment of young red squirrels into the population where red squirrel and grey squirrel share the same habitat (Gurnell et al 2006). Serological studies have shown that grey squirrels in North America have been exposed to squirrelpox virus and therefore grey squirrels introduced to the UK in the 19th century probably brought the virus with them (McInnes et al 2012).’

Dr Anthony W Sainsbury, Zoological Society of London, Regent’s Park, London NW1 4RY
Professor Andrew A Cunningham, Zoological Society of London, Regent’s Park, London NW1 4RY
Professor John Gurnell, Emeritus Professor of Ecology, Queen Mary, University of London
Dr Peter W. W. Lurz, Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies and Roslin Institute, University of Edinburgh, Easter Bush Campus, Roslin, Midlothian EH25 9RG
Dr Colin McInnes, Moredun Research Institute, Pentlands Science Park, Easter Bush, Midlothian, EH26 OPZ

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