



Squirrel Pox Virus & Treatment Red Squirrel Post-mortems



The Squirrel Pox Virus

Squirrel Pox Virus (SQPV) poses a significant threat to red squirrel populations. Infected grey squirrels have antibodies to the disease, and it is thought that they can be potential vectors. The disease is highly infectious, and is lethal to red squirrels. SQPV can be carried and transmitted by both red and grey squirrels. Although the exact method of transmission remains unclear, it is thought that squirrels pass on the disease by direct contact, though it may also be passed on through urine, faeces and scent marking.

The Squirrel Pox Virus (SQPV) is a major cause of red squirrel death and can devastate a local community of red squirrels.

Identifying SQPV in Live Squirrels

Squirrels in the initial stages - the first week - of this disease appear lethargic and dopey with poor coordination. If the squirrel is caught at this stage, it is possible to treat it successfully (see 'Treating SQPV' below).

By the second week of onset, the squirrel develops lesions around its mouth, eyes, nose and genitals. SQPV symptoms appear very similar to those of myxomatosis in rabbits. At this stage the squirrel is highly infectious and beyond the stage of treatment. A squirrel in this stage of onset should be quickly and humanely dispatched to prevent further discomfort to the animal and transmission of the disease to other squirrels in the local population.

Treating SQPV

A course of medication and care has been developed by veterinarians to treat red squirrels infected with SQPV. Treatment has a good success rate providing squirrels are caught and treated in the initial stages of the disease.

Always wear thick, heavy-duty work gloves, ideally leather, when handling sick or injured squirrels as they have very sharp teeth and claws.

If you find a sick red squirrel, place the animal in a cardboard box (larger than shoebox size) with a secure lid and air holes. Contact one of the veterinary surgeries (or the RSPCA or SSPCA) listed below and transport the animal to the surgery for treatment. If there is any time delay, provide the squirrel with a small dish of water or some segments of sliced apple. Keep the red squirrel in the box in a warm, quiet, dark area away from direct sources of heat until transportation can be arranged.

Suggested Veterinary Treatment (if Squirrel pox is suspected);

Broad spectrum antibiotics, e.g. Baytril
Anti-inflammatories
Rehydration
Eye drops
Interferon 0.1ml daily (made by Virbac tel 01359 243243)

If the red squirrel dies the body can be sent for post mortem. The results of these studies are used in a range of red squirrel projects. For instructions see below. Please advise the Save Our Squirrels Conservation Officer for your region if the red squirrel has been sent for post mortem.

Squirrel Pox and Post Mortems

Veterinary Surgeries

Frame & Swift - Jess Gillon or Kim (VN)	Carlisle and Penrith Tel 01768 862454
Eden Vet Centre - Mic Mayhew	213 Kingstown Road, Carlisle, Cumbria, CA3 0BB Tel 01228 541999 Mob 07909 920384 Fax 01228 819236
Capontree Vets - Alistair Moyer	Longtown, Cumbria Tel 01228 791245
Jim McLellan & Associates	Prudhoe, Northumberland Tel 01661 830022 NB - Will donate any Interferon past sell by date
Westway Vets - Vicky (VN)	Corbridge, Northumberland Tel 01434 632033
Mr Petchy	113 Church Road, Formby L37 3ND Tel 01704 877145

Other Organisations Providing Care

RSPCA	Tel 0870 333 5999
SSPCA Wildlife Hospital, Dunfermline	Tel 01383 412 520
South of Scotland Wildlife Hospital, Parkgate	Tel 01387 860 461
Wildlife Sanctuary, Ulgham	Tel 01670 791 778
Wildlife Sanctuary, Alnwick	Tel 01668 215 281

Conservation Offices, Save Our Squirrel Project

<i>Cumbria</i> Simon O'Hare	Cumbria Wildlife Trust, Alsaka Building Ullswater Road, Penrith, Cumbria, CA11 7EH Tel 01768 891100 Email simono@cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk
<i>Northumberland</i> Mark Wilkinson	Northumberland Wildlife Trust, Garden House St Nicholas Park, Gosforth Newcastle upon Tyne, NE3 3XT Tel 0191 284 6884 Email mark.wilkinson@northwt.org.uk
<i>Merseyside/West Lancashire</i> Fiona Robertson	Lancashire Wildlife Trust, Seaforth Nature Reserve Port of Liverpool, L21 1JD Tel 0151 920 3769 Email frobertson@lwildlife.cix.co.uk

Dead Red Squirrels

If you find a dead red squirrel it may be a good idea for it to be sent for post-mortem, in order to further our knowledge on the conservation and welfare of red squirrels. It is best to send the red squirrel as soon as possible, however it can be kept chilled for a couple of days and can be frozen if necessary. (Remember to wear disposable gloves when handling dead squirrels and wrap it well in kitchen roll and at least three plastic bags before you put it in the fridge or freezer).

The red squirrel should be sent to different places depending on the circumstances.

a) **If you know the cause of death** and there are no signs of disease, e.g. a road traffic accident or caught by a dog; then the squirrel can be used for research projects in genetics, and health surveillance, for example about squirrel diseases or harm caused by human activities.

In this case please send the red squirrel to:

Dr Tony Sainsbury
Institute of Zoology, Zoological Society of London
Regents Park, London NW1 4RY

b) **If disease is suspected**, such as squirrel pox virus, then please send the red squirrel to either:-

Dr Julian Chantrey
Leahurst Veterinary Teaching Hospital,
Liverpool University
Chester High Road
Neston, Wirral CH64 7TE

or

Paul Duff
Veterinary Investigation Centre
Merrythought
Calthwaite, Penrith
Cumbria, CA11 9RR

Please inform Mark Wilkinson the Save our Squirrels Conservation Officer at the address at the bottom of the page if you are sending a squirrel for post mortem.

Preparing the Squirrel for Postage:

1. Pack the body in absorbent material e.g. kitchen roll in **three** plastic bags, which are **tightly closed** and placed in a rigid cardboard box e.g. a tissue box. Label "Pathological Specimen - Fragile. Handle with Care" and mark with the senders' address.
2. Send by first class post.

Please pack properly - the Post Office may refuse to deliver dirty or smelly packages. Please ensure the package is posted to arrive on a weekday.

Squirrel Pox and Post Mortems

Please complete this form and send it with the red squirrel providing the following information:

Date squirrel found: _____

Location found (include 6 figure grid reference if possible) _____

Any indications of cause of death: _____

Senders Name and Address: _____

Senders telephone number _____ email _____