

To whom it may concern,

I head up the local grey squirrel cull group 167 (Thornbury, Dursley & Yate) we are part of a national volunteer group that is co-ordinating & documenting a national grey squirrel cull ahead of the planned contraceptive trials. We offer free grey squirrel control services to all in our area.

We have recently been the gaining the permission of many land owners of the 8km strip of woodland that runs from Stinchcombe to Owlpen for our volunteers to control the grey squirrels that are decimating many species of tree and are suspected to be having a significant effect on the local wild bird population as they have now reached much higher numbers than ever before.

Later this winter we plan to carry out a big drey disturbance control exercise on two separate days where a team of 3-4 pole men & 6-8 dispatchers will work systematically from one end of the wood (or rather everywhere that we have permission) to the other, into the wind where possible disturbing the all of the dreys dispatching as many escapees as possible before destroying the dreys

Destroying the dreys does not only to disrupt the squirrels but, following the exercise it is obvious exactly where the squirrels are establishing themselves as any new dreys are guaranteed to be in use, this allows future control to be much more targeted and also allows us to gather data on the likely trends of the population in future years. It can be a very effective method of control but is only possible during the winter months when the leaves are off the trees.

Firstly I just wanted to inform you of our plan, we will certainly be in touch closer to the time to fore warn you that any neighbouring gun noise is a legal organised activity and not poaching activity. In the event that we work the woods from east to west you may well find that you notice an increased presence of the greys on the day and a few days following as the escapees that evade the dispatchers seeking sanctuary.

In the event that you would be willing to welcome our volunteers to assist you in culling some grey squirrels for these drey disturbance exercises I'd just like to assure you that, as always, safety is paramount all involved are licenced, vetted, insured, briefed and wear the appropriate PPE, helmets & visor for those in the drop zone of the falling drey and hearing protection for all within the vicinity of the dispatchers.

Below are further details regarding the practices & history of our volunteer organisation, I plan to attend your meeting on the 22nd of January so as to be on hand to answer any further questions etc

The Grey Area Group

History:

In June 2017 Brendan Anderson created the group "North East Grey Area" which grew much bigger than expected into a national group so the name was changed to 'UK & Ireland Squirrels The Grey Area'

Brendan is passionate about the re-introduction of red squirrels and had already done a huge amount of work co-ordinating with all sorts of bodies, public & private land owners to help control grey squirrels and to re-introduce & promote Red squirrels. Brendan is a skilled and experienced trapper and has gone to great efforts to get local councils and the like to accept the assistance and expertise offered by local volunteers such as himself so that they can more effectively control the greys without having to spend even more public money on largely ineffective pest control contractors.

Brendan set up the group with the aim to better exploit the resource of willing, passionate, experienced volunteers across the UK, with 5 years until large scale contraceptive trials were due to begin in his area he hoped that within 3 years (by June 2020) he could establish local groups all over

the UK & Ireland amounting to 20,000 volunteers in total, establishing local leadership, communication links and standardised recording methods and formats so that there could be 2 years of good nationwide data collection by the time large scale contraception administration projects began.

Aims:

Co-ordinate & document the nationwide culling of Grey Squirrels
Protect, promote & re-establish red squirrel populations
Protect & promote trees, songbirds & other native flora & fauna impacted upon by grey squirrels
Create/ promote a forum for all interested parties to share their aims & experience

Strategy:

Recruit 20,000 volunteers to actively assist with the culling of grey squirrels
Contact land & sporting right owners to promote the cull and the availability of our volunteers
Establish communication links with national & regional groups & organisations concerned with our aims
Educate the public of the benefits of our aims & promote our activities
Create & support 400 local groups of volunteers assigning a local coordinator for each
Have local groups document & collate their cull & survey data and submit annual records to the national coordinator
Strive to ensure that all of our members conduct themselves in a safe, responsible, ethical & legal manor when culling & promoting the group, disciplining, removing members who do not & referring illegal activities to the relevant authorities

Safety:

We insist that all of our members conduct their culling operations in a safe, legal & ethical manner. Whilst members are acting as individuals and are responsible for their own actions the group will not tolerate illegal, dangerous, unethical or uncourteous actions.
We insist that our members gain written permission/ instruction to carry out their control activities and that a copy of it be carried by them at all times when carrying out control activities along with a copy of their insurance, photo identification &, where applicable, their FAC/SGC
We insist that all members maintain public liability cover that covers their methods of control, we strongly recommend that they also purchase legal cover and join sporting bodies that can assist them with legal advice and support
We advise our members to engage regularly with shooting & conservation bodies to stay up to date with the latest advice and guidance.
Any members found to be in breach of our safety policies or acting in contradiction to our aims &/or strategy will be removed from the group and referred to the relevant authorities for investigation & prosecution where we consider their actions may have been illegal.

Local group 167, Thornbury, Dursley & Yate:

I agreed at Brendon's request to co-ordinate group 167 in September 2018.
I arrange regular meetings for members to exchange their experiences etc and to call on the collective wisdom of others in the group etc.
I meet with other local organisations and parties interested in squirrel control to discuss our plans and experiences, these include wildlife organisations, forestry consultants & head foresters, large land owners, the Police etc
A number of members including myself actively pursue other locals involved with squirrel control to join the group and/or to submit their cull data to the group.

A number of members actively pursue grey squirrel control permissions with public & private land owners. I insist that their written permissions detail:

Name, address & contact telephone number of the owner of the rights

Name, address & contact telephone of the shooter/ trapper for whom the agreement is made

The permitted species & methods of control (which can be listed as any legal methods) and in the case of firearms & shotguns to explicitly list what calibres

The times and methods of permissible access & whether the owner must be informed/ grant each occurrence

The address & boundaries of the land on which permission is granted

The number of assistants premised to accompany the shooter/ trapper and any additional terms (such as any assistants must be accompanied by the 'primary' shooter/ trapper with whom the agreement was made, they must be made known to & approved by the land owner in advance etc)

Duration of agreement / rights to cancel

I aim to assess the competency of all members of the group and mentor those that are less experienced, to some I act as their Firearms mentor for a pending FAC application with the Police. Only members that have been assessed as competent by me are invited to take part in group culling activities. Once they are deemed competent, I request and make copies of their insurance, FAC or SGC where relevant and photo ID if not; I make a record of the document's expiry dates and request new copies when due, in the case of FAC's and SGC's I insist that originals are brought to group culling activities and check them each day before our activities commence.

