

# Understanding values, attitudes and motivations to improve support & involvement in squirrel management



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- (2017) Interviews & focus groups with **volunteers** (n = 45) + 2 community workshops -
- (2018) Interviews with **landowners** (n = 34)
- (2016 & 2019) Interviews with the **RSU team members** (n = 11)
- (2017-2019) Short **community surveys** (n = 642)
- (2017-2019) **Evidence Review Groups** - FC guidance, mammal review article, BES poster (n = 3)
  
- (2015) nationwide survey of the **general public** (n = 3758)
- (2019) survey of the **public residing in the RSU delivery areas** (n = 1000)

- Has awareness of RSU increased during the lifetime of the project?
- Has the bigger scale of RSU improved efforts to engage with communities and volunteers?

- Has awareness/experience of red squirrels and impact of grey squirrels increased?
- How do we motivate volunteers to participate in RSU activities?
- Are volunteers interested in the 'bigger picture' of red squirrel conservation across the UK?
- What are the barriers to becoming involved in volunteering/those willing to dispatch grey squirrels?

- What are the barriers to the sustainability of volunteer groups?
- What lessons can be learned from established successful volunteering groups?

- How to improve cooperation with landowners and agencies?

- Which RSU activities and engagement efforts have had the most success?



# RECAP

- What are your aspirations for red squirrel conservation in your area?
- What do you see as the key challenges for red squirrel conservation in your area?
- Why did you start volunteering? [we would like to document your story]
- What keeps you motivated to volunteer?
- What challenges do you face in your volunteering role?
- How could your volunteering experience be improved?
- What do you think about RSU/Sciuriosity?



- Existing interest in wildlife e.g. linked to childhood memories and sense of place
- Strong desire to save an endangered species but proximity important (practical; sense of ownership)

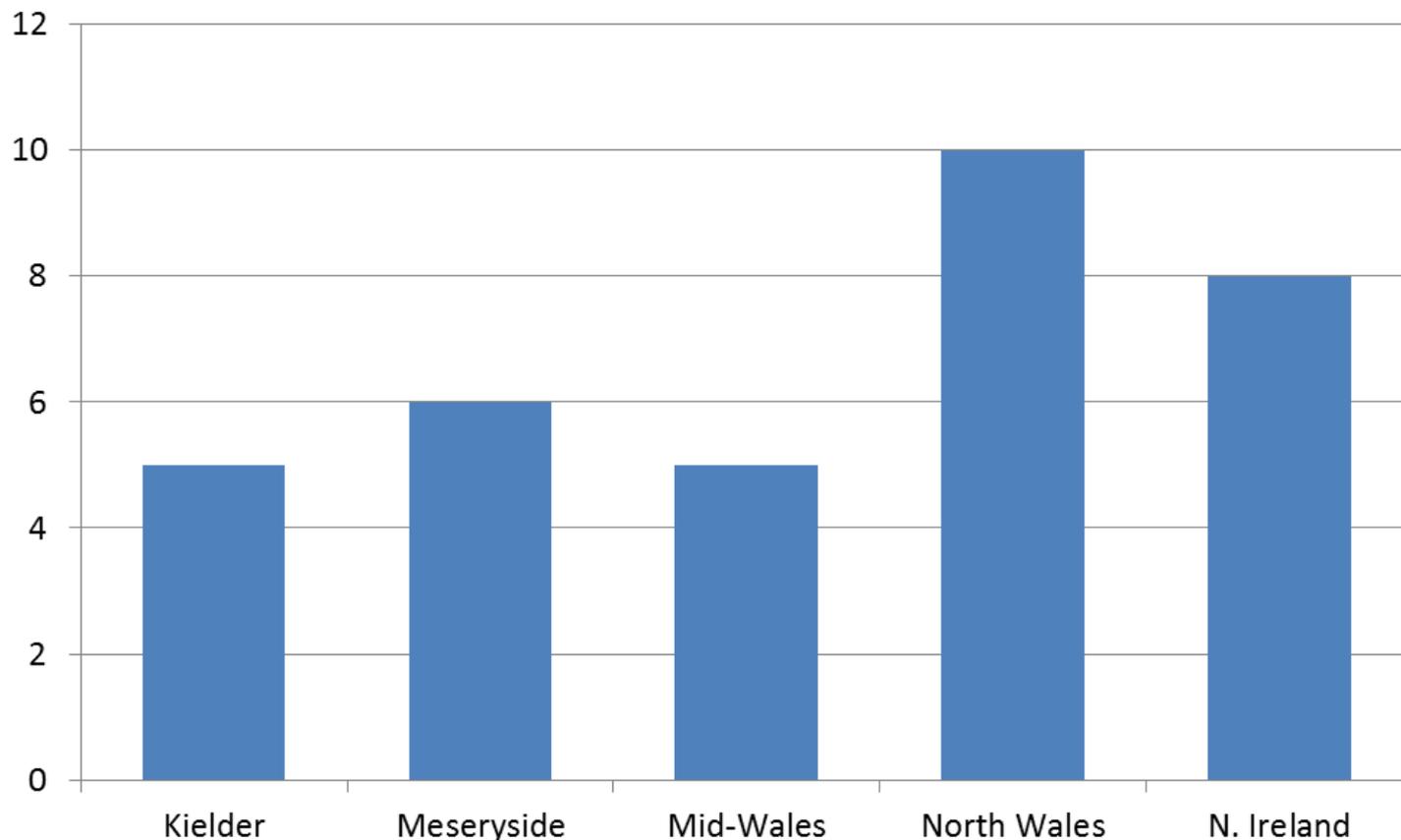
*"Because it's here on my doorstep, I feel I can look after stuff here. We can see what we're doing is working, because the red squirrel population is going up."* (Volunteer from Northern Ireland)

- Dislike of Non-Native Invasive Species – Grey squirrels = "bullies", "tree rats", "greedy", "born killers"
- Social aspects...sense of community with like-minded people; physical and mental health and well-being
- Greater knowledge, education, feedback and respect



- Finding time...majority of volunteers are retirees
- Competing with other conservation objectives (birds, bats etc.)
- Group sustainability reliant on a committed core and charismatic leader. Risky but difficult to change
- Lack of funding and training opportunities
- Difficulties of landscape-scale collaboration...impedes access; frustrates eradication efforts
- Fear of public backlash from public/lack of support from conservation landowners?





N=34 - Estates, Farmers, Charities, NGOs, Public bodies, Private woodland owners, Holiday parks, Botanic gardens, Schools, Scout camps...

*"They're a **native species** [...] they have their niche and their relationships with other plants and animals, which has been maintained for hundreds of years"*

– Private woodland owner

*"We're proud of the reds, we're glad they're here, we're managing for them, **it's something the public really likes**"*

- Nature reserve

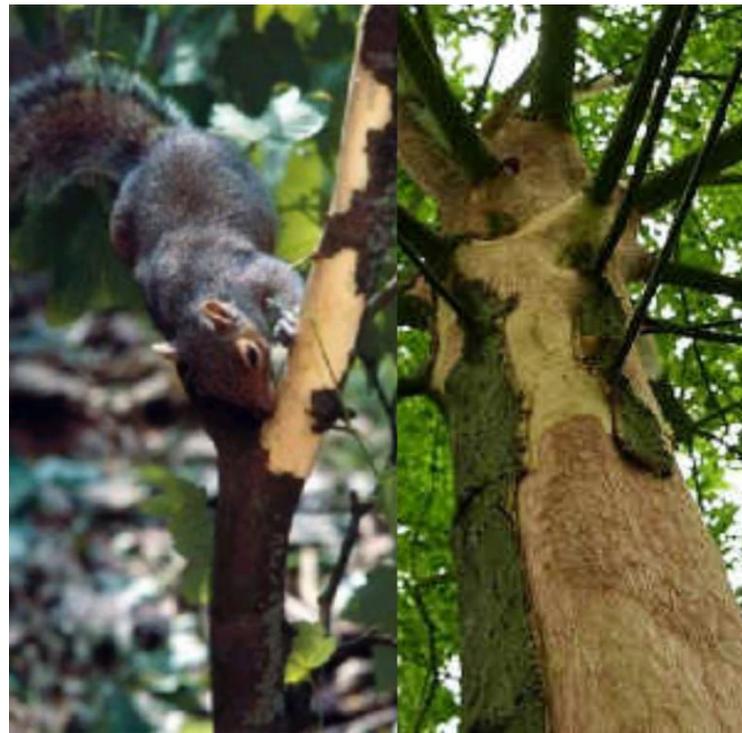


"We've had quite serious **damage to the trees** in recent years. [...] the tree from a commercial perspective, or a forester's perspective then becomes pretty useless"

- Private woodland owner

*"Birds have a lot of predators, but **stealing the eggs and stealing the chicks** and things like that. And the most important thing, they're **not native**"*

- Farmer



## 1. Trespassing and damage

*"There are people who would be quite happy if there was **no general public use**. There are others of us who would be perhaps more relaxed than we are at the moment if we knew that there was going to be no damage done"*

– Private woodland owner

## 2. Safety concerns (incl. insurance issues)

*"The **health and safety** is a little bit of a headache. [...] anybody that goes on to a site, has to have **public liability insurance** if they're working. So, I think that would be a possible stumbling block"*

– Woodland management company

## 3. Opposition to control/Fear of opposition from others

*"In an effort to try to stop any grey squirrel control, so some people can really take it to quite extreme measures whether that, be it legal or otherwise. So, I'm a little bit **wary about publicising** it too much"*

– Nature reserve

## 4. Apathy/Lack of awareness/No benefit to Landowner

"the broadleaves that we do have planted here, even if it does get hammered by the squirrels, once it's off and established and we don't plan to do anything with the majority of it, it's not even going to go for firewood, so it's plant it and leave it and **if the squirrels hammer it, the squirrels can hammer it**" - Private woodland owner

## 5. Time and resources/Perceptions of hopelessness

*"it doesn't matter how many you shoot, **there'll always be more** because they'll regenerate, won't they? The only way to get rid of the grey squirrels would be to completely eliminate them and that's not possible. Well, I suppose it's theoretically possible if you put enough effort in, but it's not in practice possible"* - Estate

## 6. Conflict with other objectives

*"We are trying to conserve woodland and red squirrels, alright yes they do very well in conifer areas but **we can't just keep conifers just because of the red squirrels** if you know what I mean, or rather we're not going to"* - Charity

## 1. Conforming to norms

*"The last thing I want to happen is for my national nature reserve to be acting as a refuge then for grey squirrels in the wider area where so much grey squirrel control is taking place"*

– Nature reserve

## 2. Financial incentives

*"All the trapping we were doing was Glastir-funded [Welsh grant scheme]. That's now stopped, so I think that's likely to be the end of our trapping programme, until we get **more funding**"*

– Private woodland owner

## 3. Greater awareness

*"Estates are really much more commercially minded [...] **hammering home the fact that grey squirrels will damage their crops** which actually then might make [control] worth their while [...] Sometimes they don't quite realise the extent" – Charity*

## 4. Instilling Trust in rangers/volunteers

*"You wouldn't want any Tom, Dick or Harry, [...] you're maybe not here, they're sitting there, they're on your property for however long. You have to have **a good relationship** and you have to **trust them and know them**" - Farmer*

## 5. New approaches

*"the **contraceptive** thing I think is possibly our only chance long term for the survival of the red squirrel because that's going to make it easier for land owners who haven't got the investment or the ability to put feet on the ground. That's **less labour intensive**. So I think that's very positive if it comes off" - Charity*



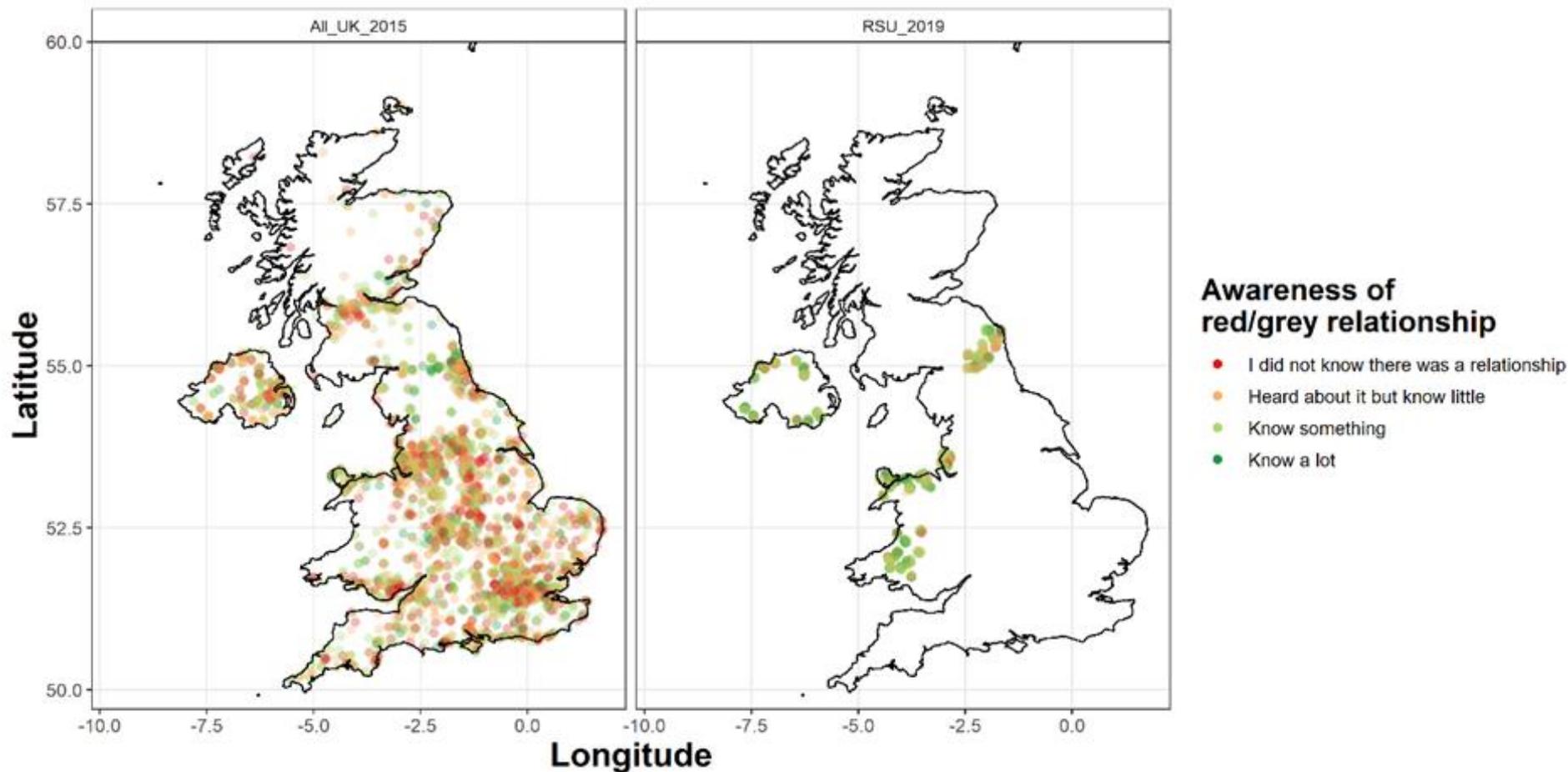
# Momentum



- 1) How do levels of knowledge and values differ between those in red squirrel areas and the wider population?
- 2) How does knowledge and acceptability of control methods differ between those in red squirrel areas and the wider population?
- 3) To what extent are those in red squirrel areas involved in squirrel management?



Age bracket	2015	2019	Census
18 - 24	10	11	12
25 - 34	16	17	17
35 - 44	16	18	18
45 - 54	19	18	18
55 - 64	17	15	15
65+	21	21	21
Prefer not to say	0	0	0
Sex	2015	2019	Census
Male	47	49	49
Female	53	51	51
Other	0	0	0

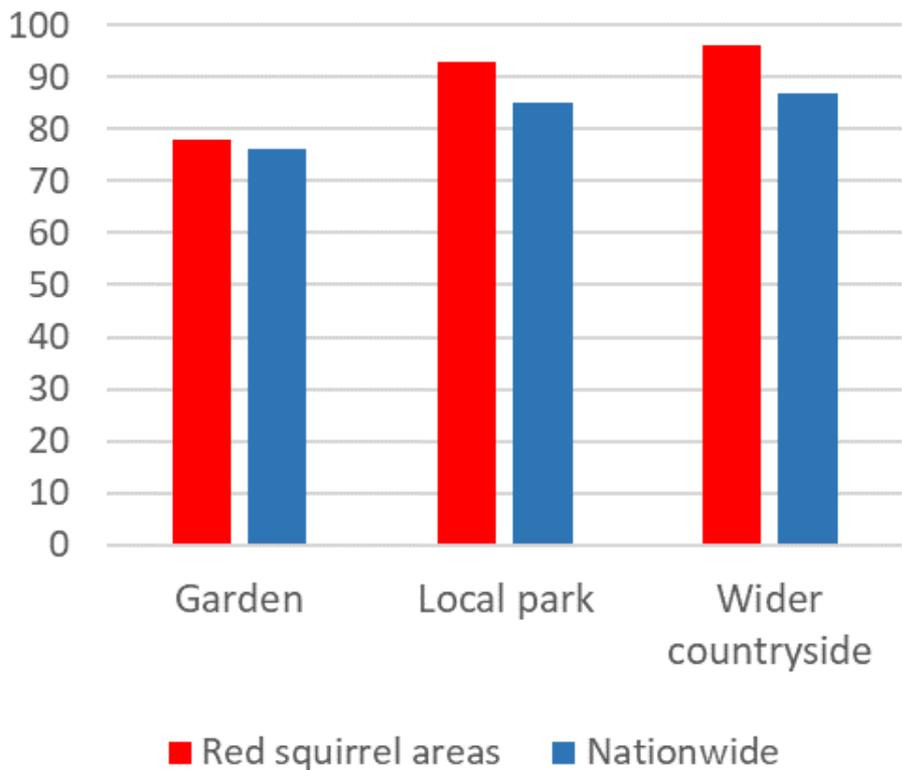


87% correctly noted that Red squirrels are threatened while Grey squirrels are thriving.

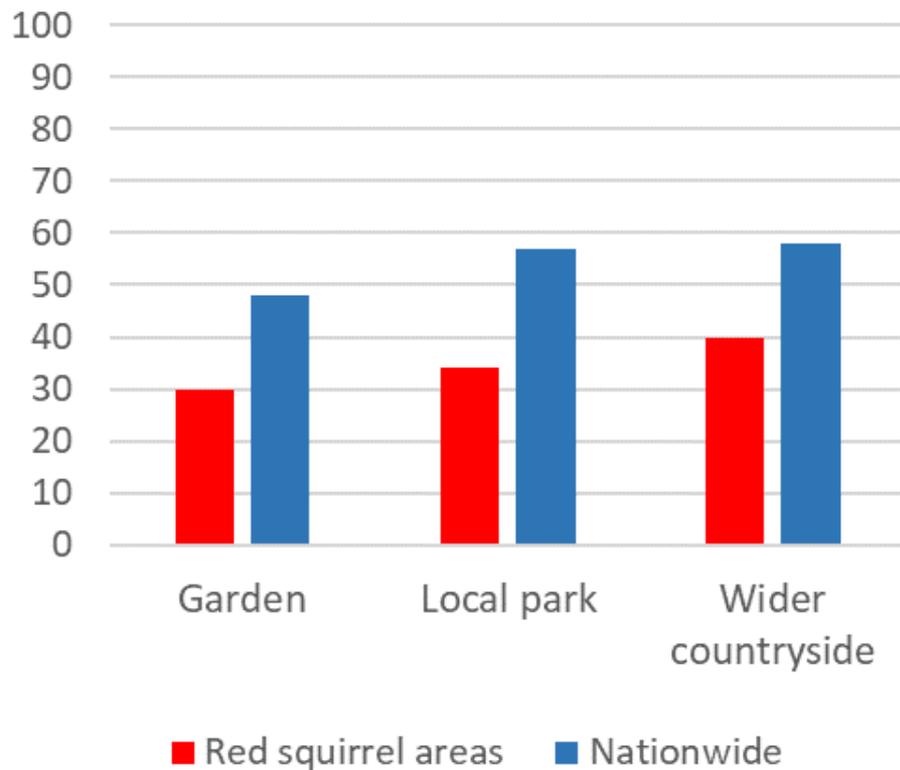
89% correctly noted that Red squirrels are native, while Grey squirrels are an invasive, alien species.

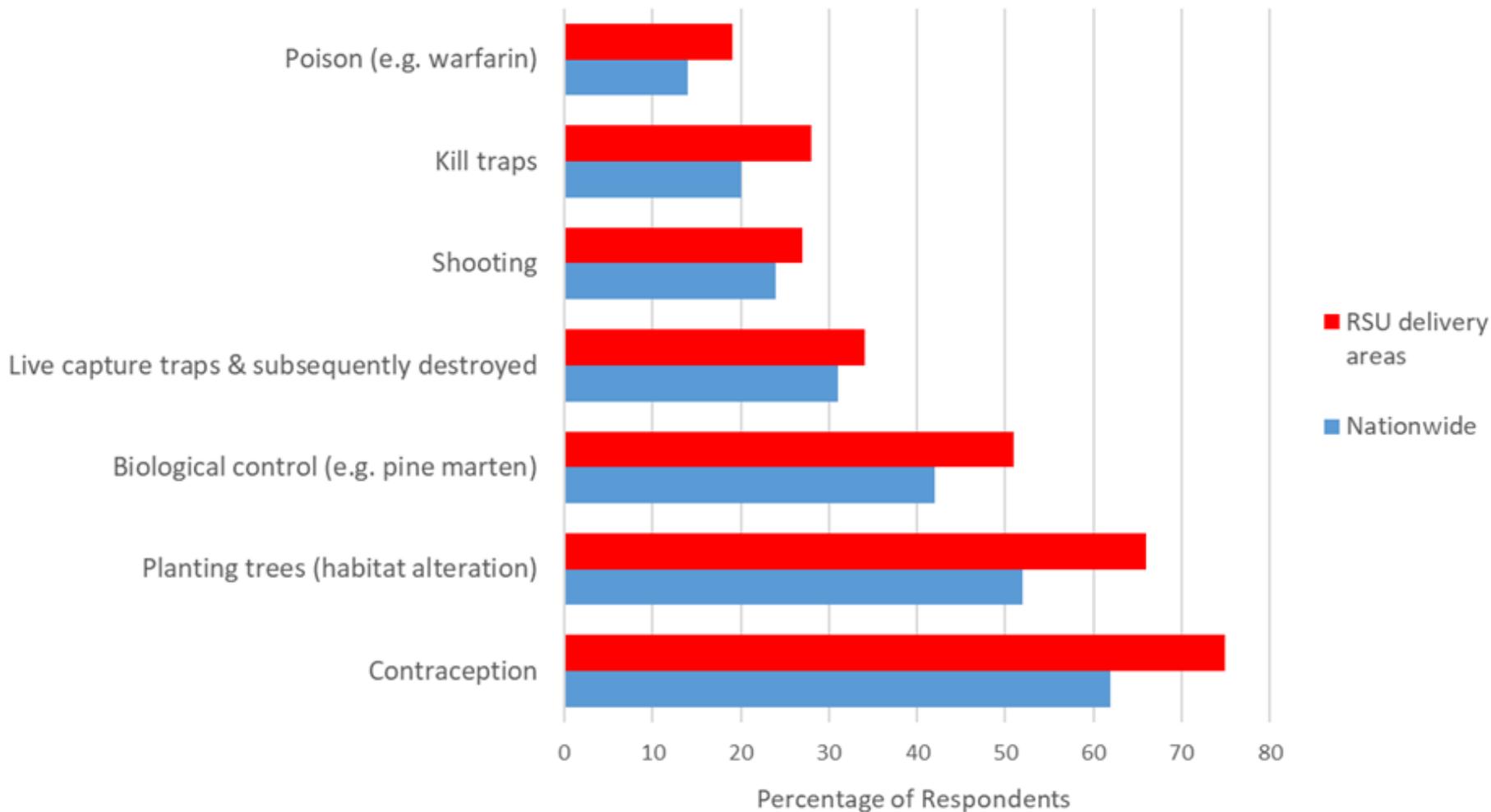
- Those in red squirrel areas expressed greater agreement (than the wider population) that **red squirrels provide positive impacts to the economy** (79% vs. 55%) **and to society** (89% vs. 55%).
- There is greater agreement among those in red squirrel areas that **it is sometimes necessary for forest and woodland managers to undertake management which the local community and wider public may not agree with** (67% vs. 55%).
- In contrast, the wider public were more likely to agree that **it is important to conserve both red and grey squirrel populations** (59% vs. 39%).

Desire to see Reds



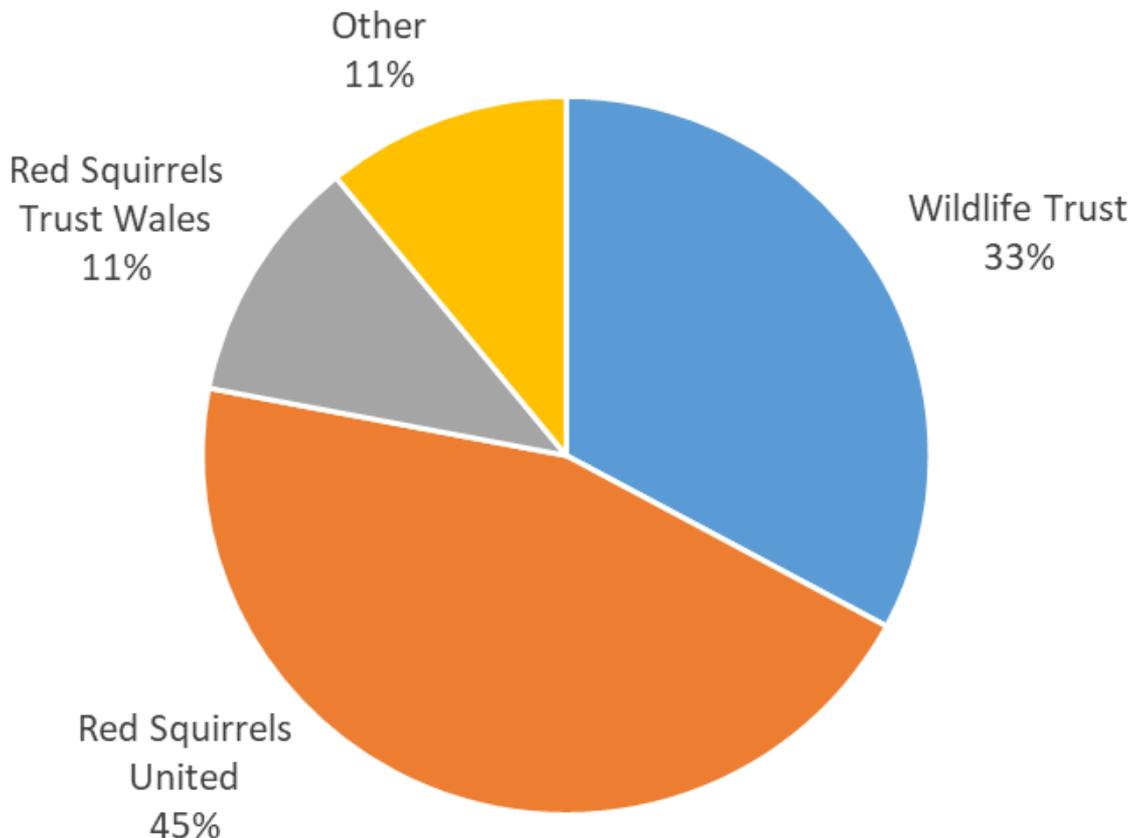
Desire to see Greys

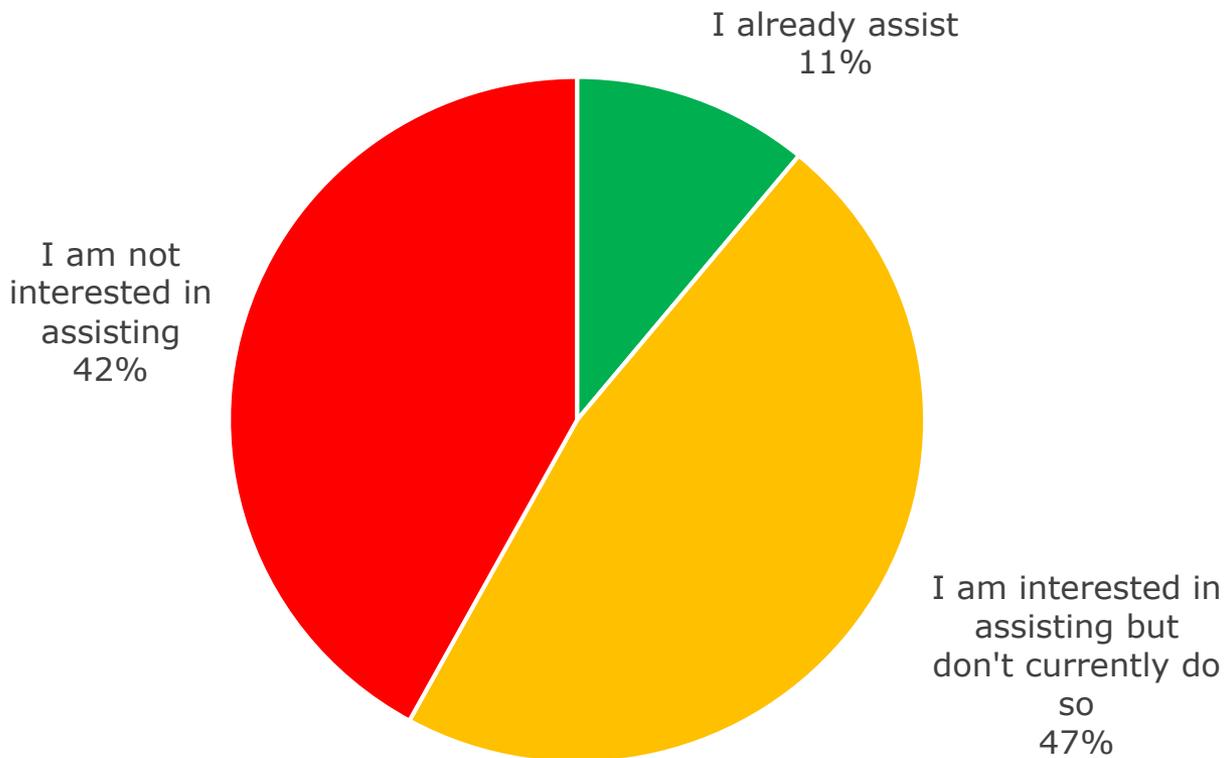


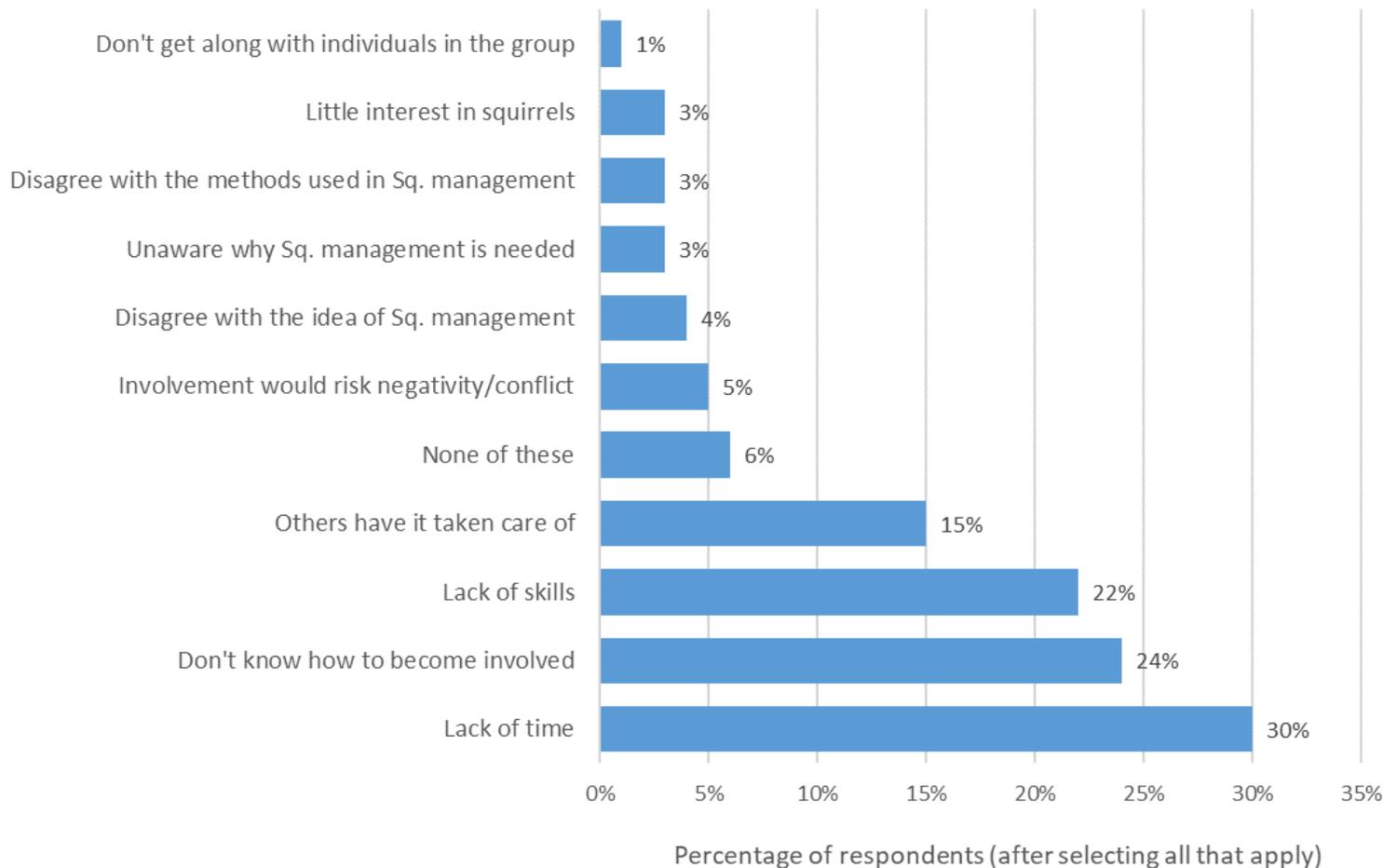


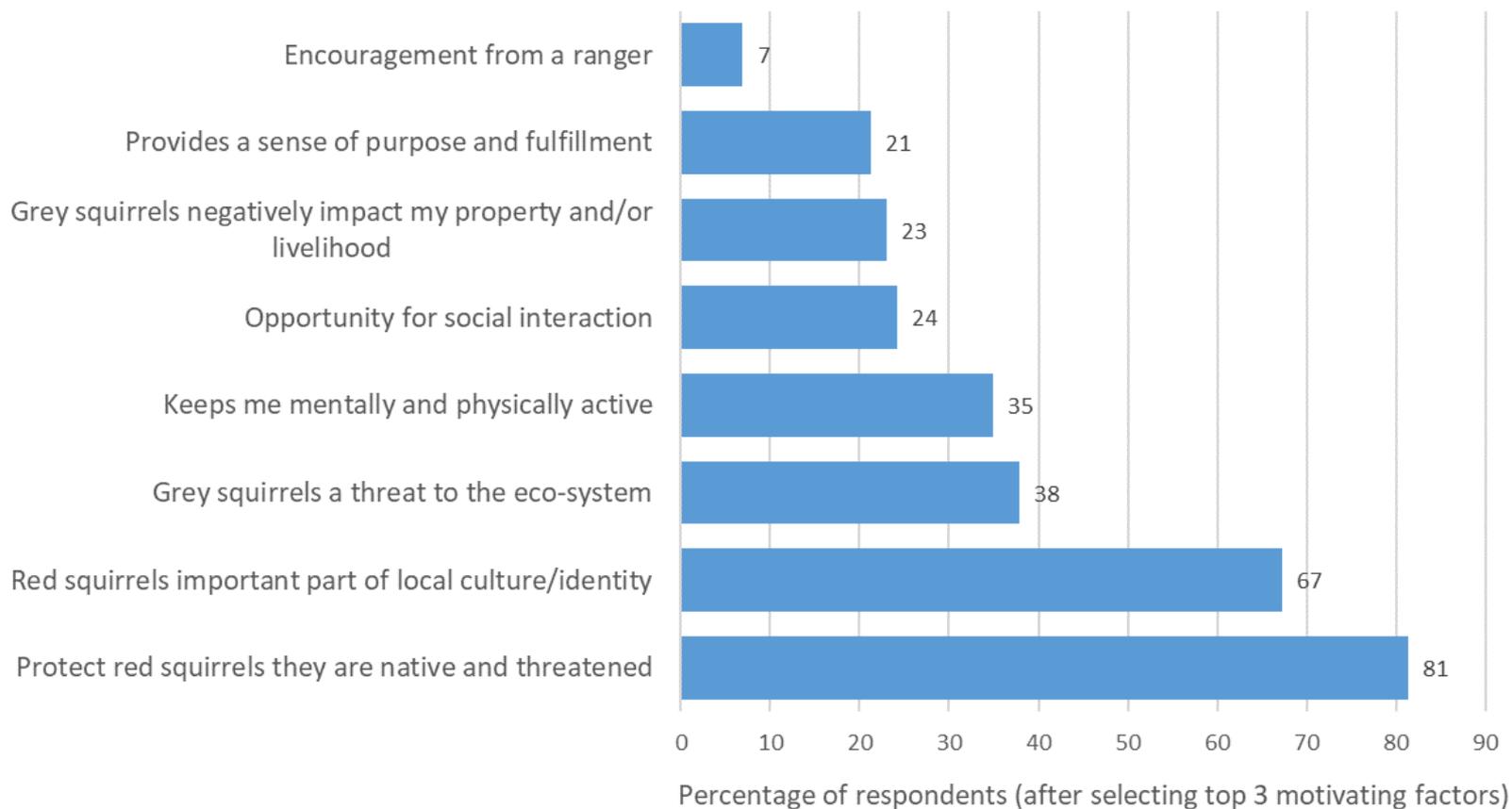
In RSU areas, 53% are aware of coordinated squirrel management activities, compared with 11% of the wider population

Awareness of those undertaking squirrel management in respondents' local area (n = 528)









Role in Squirrel Management	Level of Interest
Monitoring and reporting sightings	68%
Hosting/filling feeders	41%
Raising awareness at fairs/events etc.	23%
Allowing access to property for grey control	18%
Admin duties e.g. collating sightings data or managing web-content	15%
Supplying materials or construction e.g. squirrel feeders	8%
Coordinating/training volunteers	6%
Carrying out grey squirrel control	5%
Providing a venue for meetings/events	2%
None of these	2%

## Opportunities/successes

- New volunteering group in case study areas/existing one given new lease of life
- Huge range of activities increased awareness: *"Are you the man I tell about red squirrels?"*
- Knowledge sharing between case study areas
- Team spirit and motivation
- Knowledge Fair broadening volunteers perspectives beyond their locality



## Challenges/needs

- Changes in goals/more time needed
- Need to continue knowledge exchange after RSU ends
- Motivations of volunteers in difficult sites/tasks
- Motivation of local authorities and public bodies (staff turnover/attitudes)
- Will volunteers feel able to take on more responsibility after RSU (that are not already self-organising)?
- Further funding needed to keep volunteer groups going?
- Staff member/ranger – the 'glue'...RSU finding ways to support



- The Greys label as a 'pest' is not always accepted nationally but high awareness of grey impact in delivery areas.
- Growth in awareness of red squirrel conservation & local support - those exposed to conservation/controls are among the most accepting.
- Commonly used methods aren't particularly acceptable and are likely considered inhumane. Communication is key.
- New methods considered attractive e.g. Kania trap, pine marten. New guidance on best use made available.
- Growth in volunteers and landowners support - provision of training, incentives, and information/feedback
- Further opportunities to increase volunteers identified (framing of benefits, awareness and participation in diverse range of roles)
- Economic benefits realised and increased awareness may help to attract a wider range of supporters e.g. Local Authorities, businesses