



COUNTING THE COST OF SQUIRREL DAMAGE IN A SMALL WOOD

Bron Haul Farm, Abergele, Conwy:

16ha woodland at 20 yrs, 4ha at 4 yrs

Owners: Ruth Pybus and David Brown

Primary Management Plan objective:

High quality hardwood timber

Set up costs

The woodland was planted under the Woodland Grant Scheme and Glastir Woodland Creation and managed under Better Woodlands for Wales (BWW) and Glastir. The work was done by the owners, volunteers and some paid help.

Total planting and establishment costs were **£50,000**

Expected income

By **2040** woodland is expected to produce

3m³/ha/yr sawlogs @£100/tonne standing = **£4,800 pa**

increasing by **2060** to...

4m³/ha/yr sawlogs @£100/tonne standing=**£6,400 pa**

Under attack!

The 16ha of broadleaf trees which were planted 20 years ago have attracted the unwelcome attention of grey squirrels despite a vigorous grey squirrel control policy which began when trees were just 10 years old.

In the year before control was introduced, grey squirrels damaged trees by bark stripping and damaging shoots in the following proportions:

30% of the birch

20% of the beech

In one year, within just one week at the end of the trapping period when one squirrel had been missed it damaged

5% of the oak

Fighting back

Trees are at their most vulnerable to squirrel attack between the ages of 10 – 40 years. David and Ruth have been using live traps since the trees were 10 years old, twice and sometimes three times a year catching on average 60-80 squirrels.

Costs of trapping

Trap sites are chosen to give good coverage of the woodland, focussing on veteran trees favoured for dreys and the ingress points of wildlife corridors. Consideration is also given to a logical trap route walk around the wood.

Platforms are built to set multicatch traps off the ground (away from badgers) x 20 (1 per ha).

£50 each = **£1000**

Traps for each platform

£30 each = **£600**

Traps baited with peanuts =

£40 p/annum

Annual hours spent trapping: 60 per annum

Minimum wage equivalent = **£470 p/annum**

£15 per hour wage equivalent = **£900 p/annum**

The traps are liberally baited twice without being set. Each visit takes 1.5 hours. They are then baited again to start the trapping session. It takes about 2 hours to visit all traps, dispatch squirrels and rebait. The traps are then visited at least daily until no more squirrels are caught. Typically, trapping will go on for a week.

Ruth and David have not had to replace damaged trees. Their vigilance has resulted in healthy trees which are free of damage and safer. They hope the removal of greys helps native birds and mammals.

The future

In the long term they want the woodland to be financially viable should there be no grants available to private woodland owners.

They advocate regional control groups with a co-ordinated grey squirrel eradication programme funded by the public purse.

In 2017 Bron Haul was visited by a pine marten. The owners have set a video camera to see if it returns and whether there is any noticeable impact in their woods.

The RFS is an active member of the

UK Squirrel Accord

For our policies on grey squirrel control visit

www.rfs.org.uk/news/hot-topics/grey-squirrels/