Trees for Life’s red squirrel project wins global conservation competition

Thursday 1 November, 2018

Scotland’s only entry in the Forests category of a leading global conservation competition has won funding of more than £25,000 to help ensure the long-term survival of Scotland’s red squirrels.

Trees for Life’s Reds Return initiative secured almost 7,400 votes and widespread social media support – including from television presenter Chris Packham – in the 2018 European Outdoor Conservation Association vote held between 8-22 October.

The success will allow the volunteering conservation charity to step up its pioneering red squirrel reintroduction project. Reds from thriving populations in Inverness-shire and Moray will be reintroduced to four northwest Highland woodlands where they can spread, safe from threats from grey squirrels.

This will also help natural expansion of native woodlands, because red squirrels plant new trees by forgetting where they have buried their winter stores of nuts and seeds.

“This is wonderful news for Scotland’s red squirrels and its wild places. We are so grateful to everyone who supported us and made this possible,” said Steve Micklewright, Trees for Life’s Chief Executive.

School activities, community events and citizen science opportunities will allow people to get involved with the project, which also aims to boost nature tourism and rural economies in the Highlands. The Gaelic language will be supported, including through new teaching materials about red squirrels.

The UK’s red squirrel populations have been decimated by reduction of forests to isolated fragments, and by competition and lethal disease from non-native greys. Only an estimated 138,000 reds survive, with some 120,000 in Scotland.

The plight of red squirrels, as well as species such as wildcat and capercaillie, is highlighted in a major new book – Scotland: A Rewilding Journey – published by Trees for Life and SCOTLAND: The Big Picture last month. The landmark report calls for a bold new rewilding approach, in which nature is allowed to work in its own way on a big scale, to benefit both wildlife and people.

Trees for Life has already reintroduced 140 red squirrels across several Highland locations, and these new populations have been breeding and spreading into wider areas. See www.treesforlife.org.uk.

The European Outdoor Conservation Association supports conservation by raising funds from the European outdoors sector, and by promoting care and respect for wild places. Its biannual competition attracts huge international interest. See www.outdoorconservation.eu.

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