



## Squirrelpox Virus

*Squirrelpox Virus (SQPV) poses a major threat to red squirrel populations.* Grey squirrels are immune to the disease, but it is lethal to red squirrels within 15 days from onset. The disease is highly infectious, and can be transmitted by both red and grey squirrels. Although a lot remains unknown about SQPV, there is very strong evidence that grey squirrels act as a vector for transmission. Research is currently being conducted to help identify how squirrels become infected, and the method by which the virus is transmitted between squirrels.

The SQPV is a key cause of red squirrel decline and can rapidly devastate local red squirrel populations where it becomes prevalent. Please report any suspected cases to the Save our Squirrels project.

### Identifying Squirrelpox virus

Red squirrels in the initial stages of onset appear lethargic and dopey with poor coordination. They may start to show signs of lesions and ulceration to exposed skin. If the squirrel is caught at this stage, it is possible to treat it successfully if it is taken to a vet.

Vets should make an informed decision whether to treat an infected squirrel depending on the likelihood of survival, and should contact Red Squirrels Northern England for treatment protocol if necessary.

By the second week of onset, the squirrel develops swelling, ulceration and lesions on all areas of exposed skin; around its mouth, eyes, nose, paws and genitals. SQPV symptoms appear very similar to those of myxomatosis in rabbits (although the two actual diseases are not in anyway similar or related). At this stage of onset the squirrel is highly infectious. If all practicable efforts to trap or catch are unsuccessful, the animal should be quickly and humanely dispatched to prevent further discomfort and transmission of the disease to other squirrels.

Lesions and ulceration around:

EYES  
NOSE  
MOUTH

and also on  
all other areas  
of exposed skin

(Photo by Mark Wilkinson)

