

NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND MEDIA RELEASE
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The reds of Brodick Castle

After a summer spent in the treetops, autumn is the time when Scotland's reds hit the forest floor and truly come to life.

Autumn is the season for spotting red squirrels as they come down in search of supplies to build their winter stores.

Reds do not hibernate, instead they huddle together in dreys during the depths of winter, living off the caches they have hidden away across their territories.

This is the one time of year that you are guaranteed to spot reds in one of the 19 areas of the country which are classed as 'squirrel strongholds' – far removed from invading greys and the pox they bring with them.

Among those 19, Arran stands apart, an island sanctuary where they not only survive but thrive in the woods which stand in the shadow of Goatfell.

A prime spot to catch them is at Brodick Castle, Arran's grand estate, which extends from seashore to mountain top and is cared for by the National Trust for Scotland.

As the Trust's senior ranger on Arran, this is one of Kate Sampson's favourite times of the year, one where she can not only spot her tufty neighbours but see their 'personalities' and how they behave.

"You don't see them as much in the summer as they are up in the treetops," explained Kate. "Autumn is the best time to spot them as they are down on the forest floor, looking to build their winter supplies, which they bury in caches.

"They love hazelnuts, they go mad for them. They also love pinecones, acorns and you also see them doing unusual things, like gathering fungi, which they then hang in trees to dry before caching.

"I love to watch their behaviour at this time, it's great fun and they are actually really individual. You'll see them do the funniest things and, if they find food and realise, they are being watched by another squirrel, you'll see them turn their backs, pretend to cache it and then run off somewhere else to bury it."

The Scottish Wildlife Trust report that as much as 75% of the UK's estimated 160,000 red squirrel population live in Scotland. There are strongholds in the Highlands and Perth, which have not been reached by greys, but the situation remains perilous with a number of organisations currently involved in the Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels project.

Arran's squirrels are in rude health. No doubt helped by their island location, [a 2014 study by the University of Edinburgh](#) found that they were both physically and genetically 'fit and healthy'.

Compared to Scotland's other red populations, they also have a very unusual history.

"Red squirrels were actually introduced to the island in 1950s by the then Duchess of Montrose. She got them through an Exchange and Mart from Belgium," added Kate with a laugh.

"They are all reds but there are darker genes in the mix and some are actually quite black. You also see their coats change at this time of year as the weather gets colder, they moult, their winter coats come in and this is when the little tufts on their ears appear.

"You see other changes at this time of year as well. In the summers they live alone but during the winter, when it gets really cold, you'll see them sharing dreys to keep warm.

"There is something magical about Reds," Kate added. "You get so many people coming here to study, photograph and spot them."

The visitors are, in part, drawn by Brodick Castle's squirrel hide, a little retreat in the forest which overlooks a feeding station.

There are paths criss-crossing the property and surrounding country park, which are part of a new campaign by the National Trust for Scotland, which is encouraging people to 'Stride out for Scotland' and visit the country's national landmarks and outdoor sites.

The campaign has been designed for the current Covid-climate and encourages people to enjoy the outdoors responsibly and safely.

Due to this, entry to the Brodick hide is limited to single groups but it is the prime spot to see an animal which, for most people in the lowlands and central belt, has disappeared from sight.

"The best time to catch them is during the middle of the day," said Kate. "They tend to sleep in most mornings. The trick is to be quiet, even in the hide. If you are, this is where you will see them at their best and be able to see all of their different behaviours."

To find out more about Arran's red squirrels and plan your trip to Brodick Castle, visit: [nts.org.uk](https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)

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Editor's Notes:

The National Trust for Scotland is the charity that celebrates and protects Scotland's heritage. It relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work of caring for the natural and built heritage of Scotland for everyone to enjoy.

From coastlines to castles, art to architecture, wildlife to wildernesses, the National Trust for Scotland exists to protect the national and natural treasures we all love. To plan your visit today, enter your postcode at www.nts.org.uk.

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