

# Blair farm welcomes the 'Habitat Heroes'

ENDANGERED red squirrels have been given a lifeline at a Perthshire farm.

The Co-operative-owned site at Blairgowrie is working with national conservation project, Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels (SSRS), which has identified the iconic species as indigenous to the area.

The group helps to monitor the red squirrel population on the farm and puts up "reds-only" feeding boxes to supplement their diet.

Dubbed 'Habitat Heroes', the project aims to improve the habitats, feeding and breeding opportunities for endangered or protected species, helping to safeguard them for the future.

Farm manager Douglas McTaggart said that protecting the environment and wildlife on the land it farms was one of the company's priorities.

"As Britain's biggest farmer we feel we have a responsibility to lead the way environmentally, and I'm delighted that our farm is taking part in this important national initiative," he declared.

"The Habitat Heroes project taking place at Blairgowrie and five other sites across the country gives us the chance to go that bit further and look at ways we can really make our land work for local wildlife."

Ken Neil, project officer for Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels,

said an excellent environment for red squirrels was being provided by making simple adaptations to the farm.

"A good mix of conifer trees provides a consistent habitat for the animals, whilst erecting specially adapted red squirrel feeders make it difficult for grey squirrels and birds to steal the red squirrels' food," he declared.

In addition to special feeders, a nutritious mix of squirrel food will be used that includes giant sunflower seeds, hazelnuts, pine nuts, maize, hazelnuts, almonds, and monkey nuts.

A series of monthly woodland surveys will also be conducted to monitor the squirrels'

progress and to ensure that the programme is constantly updated to help the squirrels thrive.

It is believed that only 121,000 red squirrels are left in Scotland, accounting for most of the UK population.

The Co-operative Farms has been farming the land at Blairgowrie since 1952, and the crops grown at the farm include carrots, strawberries, cereals, spring barley, rapeseed, wheat and winter barley.

The farm also hosts an environmental scheme that has led to 1.55 hectares of arable land being converted back to wildflower meadow.



**RED ALERT:** Red squirrels are being given a home at Blairgowrie.

Jimmie Reid