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Spotting red squirrels is a hard nut to crack for a quarter of British adults who have never seen one in their lives

New research from Center Parcs has today revealed that red squirrels are becoming a rarer sight for Britons than feared, with a quarter (25%)* of adults and over half of children (58%) admitting they have never seen one.

Tellingly, two in ten (19%) children under the age of eight think squirrels only exist in fictional books, TV programmes and films.

The revelation comes as the red squirrel is currently suffering major decline in the UK with numbers falling from a high thought to be around 3.5 million**, to a current estimated population of around 120,000 and just 15,000 in England.

However, only half (53%) of the adults polled would consider red squirrels to be a declining species, with one in ten thinking they've just moved to another country. Half of people (51%) on the other hand, were able to correctly identify that the key reason red squirrels are dying out is due to the deadly disease – squirrel pox – carried by their grey cousins.

Despite the bleak outlook, one of the most highly populated areas of red squirrels in the UK is Cumbria, home of Center Parcs Whinfell Forest, which is one of 18 refuges in England and Wales providing a safe haven for red squirrels. Here the figures are in the hundreds thanks to the steps taken to protect red squirrels, by the likes of Center Parcs' Red Squirrel Ranger, Jerry Moss.

Jerry Moss has worked with a carpenter to create a truly spectacular feeding station for the red squirrels, which is identical to the plush Woodland Lodges seen at Center Parcs' Whinfell Forest. Complete with a living room, dining table, bedroom, bathroom and kitchen kitted out with all the essentials (including a quintessential chalkboard!), the red squirrels are now dining in style.

The lodge, which has been created entirely out of squirrel safe materials, boasts a hidden trough which is filled with delicious nuts for the squirrels to graze on throughout the day and will stay in Whinfell Forest for the bushy-tailed creatures to use.

The red squirrels will now have plenty of time to get used to their new lodge before the winter months come in, when the food is less plentiful and it becomes more difficult for them to forage.

Jerry Moss, Red Squirrel Ranger at Center Parcs Whinfell Forest, said:

“A big part of my job is to ensure the red squirrels have the opportunity to forage for food and to give them a helping hand should they need it. I've been putting out feeders for years but had the idea of commissioning a special Center Parcs feeder for them when I saw how much they like to get up close and personal to the lodges on village. I thought, why shouldn't they get the luxury our guests enjoy on their break!

It's a privilege to help the red squirrels and educate others about the species. At Whinfell Forest, guests can take part in A Red Squirrel Family Adventure, where our Rangers lead a walk around the feeding area at the Ranger's Lodge. We provide a map for children encouraging them to look out for signs of the red squirrel and to solve puzzles along the way which is a great way to share some important messages."

*National representative based on OnePoll survey of 1500 UK Adults and their children between the ages of 6 – 10, conducted in August 2017

** <http://www.rsne.org.uk/threats>

Notes to Editors:

- Center Parcs has five villages across the UK; Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire, Elveden Forest in Suffolk, Longleat Forest in Wiltshire, Whinfell Forest in Cumbria and Woburn Forest in Bedfordshire
- As the leader in the UK short break holiday market, Center Parcs regularly achieves average annual occupancy in excess of 97%.
- Center Parcs offers weekend, (Friday to Monday) or midweek (Monday to Friday) breaks and welcomes more than 2.2 million guests each year, with 96% of guests expressing an intention to return
- The Center Parcs concept is to provide a range of high quality accommodation, shops, restaurants and exceptional leisure facilities, carefully nestled amongst 400 acres of protected forest environment.
- This concept originated in Holland in 1967, with the first UK Center Parcs opening in 1987. Center Parcs is now a separate entity in the UK.
- Center Parcs has been announced 'Best Family Friendly UK Holiday Provider' in the Tommy's Awards for the fourteenth year in a row.

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