Crack squirrels: the making of a bushy tale

It was the drug tale that had legs – and it ran and ran. The eye-popping revelation last month that squirrels in Brixton, south London were hooked on crack cocaine was reported all over the national media. 'SQUIRRELS JOIN THE DRUG WAR', screamed the Daily Mail, while rival Daily Express devoted 400 words under the headline 'SQUIRRELS GO NUTS FOR CRACK COCAINE'. Tourists photographed each other standing next to billboards advertising the story. But where did it come from?

Druglink can reveal that the source of the story was a tongue in cheek comment on an internet chat forum. In a post on the Brixton-based web community, urban75 – which made headlines in 2002 when the then Commander of Brixton Police Brian Peddle wrote on the forum that he found the "concept of anarchism" appealing – 'Bob' asked 'Can squirrels get addicted to crack?'

Bob explained that one of his neighbours had told him crack dealers were hiding stashes of the drug in his front garden. 'An hour earlier I'd seen a squirrel wandering round the garden, digging in the flowerbeds... do I face the prospect of dreaded crack squirrels? I'm worried by being done over by a twitchy squirrel.'

The thread was spotted by Greg Truscott, chief reporter of local newspaper the South London Press. "It was an interesting story and I'm happy to admit it's an exaggeration of the truth," he said. "I doubted there were drug-addicted squirrels out there, but our paper had nothing on pages one to five – so I thought if we have some fun and make people laugh, then why not?" Four days later the story appeared on the paper's front page and the next day was in every national newspaper, Radio 4 and the Jonathan Ross Show.

'Bob' told Druglink: "My squirrels are still happily scampering round the garden unaware of their celebrity status. And the local cats are still chasing the crack squirrels, without any fear. I've had a happy few weeks of seeing my jokey speculation become a major national story. It seems that furry animals and drugs are an irresistible combination."

Adduction chief calls time after 15 years

PETER Martin has stepped down as Chief Executive of national drugs and alcohol treatment charity Addaction.

Martin told staff it was one of the toughest decisions he has had to make in the 15 years in his role as CEO. In that time Addaction has grown from a small charity to the £22 million turnover organisation it is today, with 70 services seeing 23,000 people each year.

"What I have learned in my working life, which began in the drugs field with Phoenix House over two decades ago, is that there is no growth without pain," he said. "I feel that is true for me personally and for the organisation. Addaction will, I'm sure, sustain the passion combined with professionalism that has given it the edge in delivery in recent years."

"From my new perspective on the sidelines I will encourage a more united front among providers, who all make a difference separately, but together can really help each other and government to move the drugs agenda forward towards greater effectiveness."

Ian Robinson, CEO of EATA said: "No individual has contributed more to the development of drug treatment services than Peter Martin. Even as a successful and entrepreneurial high profile CEO, at heart, Peter has remained a drugs worker, never happier than when with clients. His legacy is huge."

Addaction's Acting Chief Executive is William Butler, former Chief Operating Office of the charity.