

KEEP IT WILD SPECIES RECOVERY CENTRE

DONOR REPORT
SPECIES RECOVERY CENTRE
REPORT 6: SEPTEMBER 2025



We bring back nature



THE SPECIES RECOVERY CENTRE

It very obvious that we are ill prepared to restore many of our lost, dwindling or otherwise threatened wildlife species at scale. While many conservation organisations are without doubt committed to doing so both the expertise required to achieve this end together with the creatures, we wish to return are generally unavailable. Many exciting projects in the UK are achieving landscape recovery, but will be inhibited without the rare and lost species required to bring those projects to their full potential. The Species Recovery Centre will collate these species into a central location, then build the captive breeding knowledge required to produce these creatures in quantity. This will allow us to deliver lost and rare species in volume to landscapes across the UK. This model has already been proven with water voles, 3000 of which are now produced annually for successful release in nature recovery projects across the UK.

SPECIES OF FOCUS

The following species range will all be priority candidates for breeding at the Species Recovery Centre due to successful recent breeding the Black Stork has been recently added to the list of species we will breed for release. Additionally, the recent regulatory change to the status of Beavers in the UK enabling wild releases means that we have decided to remove our work on the translocation of Beavers from the program and instead concentrate on the breeding of Harvest Mice. The translocation work will continue but just not funded by the Species Recovery Program

White and Black Storks

(*Ciconia Ciconia* and *Ciconia Nigra*)

Wildcats

(*Felis silvestris*)

Adders

(*Viper bera*)

Black Grouse

(*Lyrurus tetrix*)

Turtle Doves

(*Streptopelia turtur*)

Harvest Mouse

(*Micromys minutus*)

Red Backed Shrikes

(*Lanius collurio*)

Twights

(*Linaria flavirostris*)

Glow worms

(*Lampyrus noctiluca*)

Mole Crickets

(*Gryllotalpa gryllotalpa*)



GENERAL PROJECT UPDATE



The species Recovery Project began officially in June 2024, although it builds on the work carried out by Derek Gows team at Coombeshead Rewilding. The project has three principal locations, Rewilding Coombeshead in Devon, Cannwood in Somerset and OC Aviary in Staffordshire.

This report covers the May to September period on 2025.

The summer has contained highs and lows, we had exciting and successful releases of storks, turtle doves and glow worms, but the extreme prolonged heat of the summer months did impact the breeding of our twites and insects in particular.

Additional infrastructure has been constructed at Rewilding Coombeshead to accommodate 20 Black Grouse which arrive in the autumn, this replaces the pens damaged in storm Darragh at the start of 2025. Additional Black Grouse pens have been built to house our expanding flock of Black Storks.

We will be removing beavers from the Species Recovery program at the end of the year and instead will add harvest mice. This decision is made in the light of regulatory changes that now allow the wild release of beavers in the UK, this cements and secures their status.

We are pleased to report that we have achieved our 2025 funding goals, and have additionally launched a membership scheme to further supplement our income.

KIW IN THE NEWS / FILMS AND MEMBERSHIP

We have started producing monthly film content for youtube to encourage membership. One example of such a film can be watched at:

[Celebrating the Species Recovery Centre 2025 - YouTube](#)

Additionally, we have the facility for people to become donors and members through the site, and a key focus of 2025 will be to build a membership to support our work.

The White Stork, Turtle Dove and Harvest mice releases that have taken place this summer have been widely covered in the media.

Harvest Mice

['They're beautiful': 13-year-olds lead audacious project to save harvest mice in Devon | Wildlife | The Guardian](#)

White Storks

[Storks soar over Devon again after '600 years' - BBC News](#)

[Storks return to skies after rewilding | Tavistock Times Gazette](#)

Turtle Doves

[European Turtle Doves and White Storks released in Devon – BirdGuides](#)

[Rewilding Coombeshead Turtle Dove Release - Returning Turtle Doves to the Landscape - YouTube](#)



CORE OBJECTIVES OF THE SPECIES RECOVERY CENTRE

To build on this success we are looking to establish around the infrastructure that already exists at the Derek Gow Consultancy at Upcott Grange Farm in Devon a central hub for species restoration. The staff at the hub will build on experience in breeding, caring for and releasing lost and endangered UK species. We will work with other major landowners collaboratively to create satellite breeding and release facilities operated under guidance of the Species Recovery Centre team. These satellite centres reduce the risks of having all animals at one site. The Species Restoration Centre will focus on the development of the following;

1

The establishment of a pool of knowledge pertinent to the techniques required to keep, breed and propagate the broadest possible range of threatened native wildlife.

3

To identify any collaboration as may be required with specialist breeders of threatened British wildlife species and to support their credible efforts to do so.

2

To identify a priority species list for captive breeding and from this secure the seed stock required to begin breeding projects.

4

To provide where habitats remain or can be created, seed populations of the above to enable their restoration in a free-living state.

MEET OUR SPECIES RECOVERY CENTRE TEAM

To deliver our Species Recovery objectives we have expanded our animal husbandry team. The team are providing expert husbandry skills at our Coombeshead site, but also at our satellite sites at Cannwood in Somerset. We currently have a vacancy for an for a husbandry staff member to join the team at Coombeshead in Devon.

Nick Viney

Project Manager



Jenny Tratt

Head of Animal Husbandry



Katie Burrell

Husbandry Staff



Izzy

Husbandry Staff



Hayley Pavis

Ecology Staff



WHITE STORK



BACKGROUND

These handsome large black and white birds with orange legs and bills hunt alone in fields, pools and streams. They nest in giant collections of twigs atop buildings or large oak trees. Lacking a vocal organ they communicate by clacking their beaks loudly. Driven to extinction in the UK due to persecution and habitat destruction.

CURRENT STATUS

There is a captive breeding stock of these animals at Coombeshead, and captive birds bred here have been successfully released with imported birds from Warsaw Zoo. This has established wild colonies at Knepp and Wadhurst park in Sussex. Birds are now successfully breeding at both sites.

NEXT SIX MONTHS OBJECTIVES

To mitigate the risk from avian flu and other diseases we have established satellite breeding sites at 42 Acres in Frome Somerset and Lowther estate in Cumbria. Late in 2026 an additional flock will be created at Cannwood in Somerset. No further releases are planned in 2026

THREE YEAR OBJECTIVES

We are building our breeding flock to a level at which 20+ chicks will be produced annually to facilitate significant releases in 2027

WHITE STORK LATEST NEWS AND UPDATES



Sixteen Chicks have been born across our sites this year.

We made a release of 10 storks at Tiverton in Devon, but no further releases are planned until 2027. Our focus in the meantime is to build the breeding flock to a level where more than 20 chicks are hatched per year to facilitate significant and meaningful wild releases.

WHITE STORK LATEST NEWS AND UPDATES 2



Our 42 Acre Breeding site established in 2024 experience some limited breeding success, these are young birds some limited success is anticipated. Two pairings occurred this year, with one pair building a nest on the provided nesting platform, the other pairing making a ground nest. The nesting platform pair were not fertile, while the ground nest yielded three eggs....two of which hatched , one was a runt and expired within 24 hrs, the other was doing well with supplementary feeding as recommended by Jenny, but was left uncovered during a short sharp shower in late May....after waiting for parents to intervene and cover it, we made the decision to remove it and hand rear it....but after a week it developed a swelling, stopped eating and expired. So, a tantalising glimpse at breeding pairs.

Some photos attached.



WHITE STORK LATEST NEWS AND UPDATES 3



A new white stork breeding facility has been constructed at Cannwood in Somerset and will soon house 8 white storks. Multiple breeding facilities geographically spread reduces the risk of an avian flu outbreak. Avian flu came perilously close to Coombeshed this autumn with an outbreak in Lifton.



WHITE STORK LATEST NEWS AND UPDATES 2



WHITE STORK LATEST NEWS AND UPDATES 4



In June 2025, ten white storks were released in North Devon by the Engi family as part of a long-term rewilding and species recovery project on their land, making them the first to be seen in the county for over 600 years. The birds were originally supplied from stock reared at Rewilding Coombeshead supported by the Species Recovery Project, were raised in aviaries on the Engi family rewilding farm near Tiverton in Devon. Initially the birds stayed close to the release site, then as their confidence and strength grew they ventured across Devon. Sightings being reported by the public across a wide area of the South West

Excitingly the flock was joined by an additional 2 birds released separately in Devon. Sightings were last reported near the Isle of Wight as the flock started in migration to Europe in late summer.

We hope they will return in the future years and we will report their progress.



BLACK STORK



BACKGROUND

The Black Stork is a large bird, standing as tall at 102cm, with a 145-155cm wingspan. They have long necks, with long pointed red bills and red legs. They are naturally solitary avoiding human contact, they hunt wetlands singularly or in small groups. They are occasional visitors to the west of the UK migrating from Europe.

CURRENT STATUS

We hatched 2 chicks at Coombeshead this year (male and female), we received 3 new birds from Wildwood Trust. This gives us 3 breeding pairs which we have housed in 3 separate enclosures.

NEXT SIX MONTHS OBJECTIVES

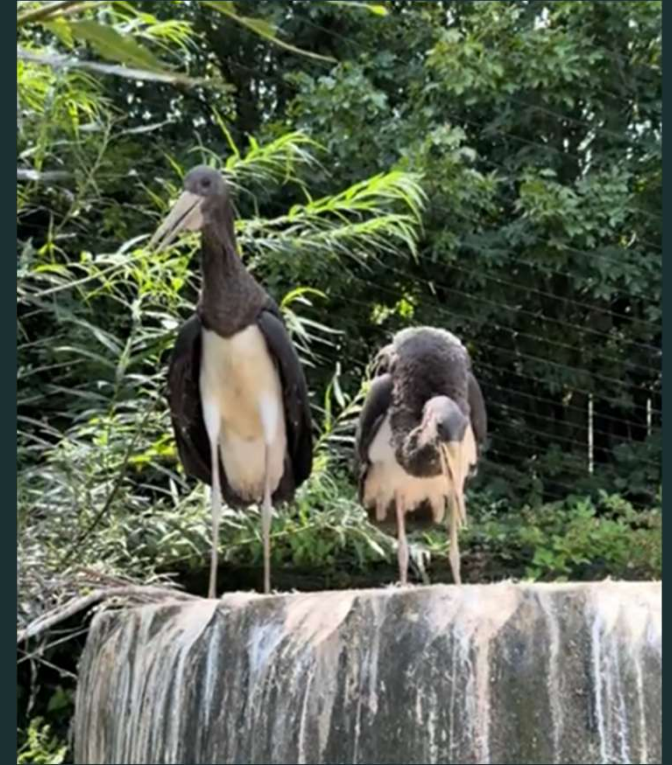
To continue our breeding program building our flock. There are now six breeding pairs. We would like to establish at least ten pairs producing enough chicks to facilitate releases.

THREE YEAR OBJECTIVES

To continue to build a breeding stock of birds and facilitate the release of birds in suitable locations in the UK

BLACK STORK LATEST NEWS AND UPDATES

See the chicks grow in 2025



Latest News

Two chicks were born in 2025. An additional young birds were sourced from Wildwood Trust. We now have 6 pairs of birds housed as individual pairs in newly constructed generous aviaries. Three new custom aviaries were constructed in 2025 to house our expanding flock.

BEAVER



BACKGROUND

Beavers are now living freely in England and Scotland as a result of escapes from enclosures. It is still not legal to release beavers into the wild in England and Wales, only into managed enclosures. Problematic wild beavers can be translocated rather than destroyed, this is the key focus of our work. This work is undertaken in conjunction with the Beaver Trust.

CURRENT STATUS

As a result of previous fund raising, a custom built beaver barn has been constructed at Coombeshead Rewilding, and the expert husbandry team there inspect, care for and pair off beavers that are translocated from Scotland. Translocations take place in conjunction with the Beaver Trust. They are then released into managed enclosures at nature projects in England and Wales

NEXT SIX MONTHS OBJECTIVES

To continue our work caring for, hosting and translocating beavers from Scotland to managed enclosures in England and Wales. To continue advising on managed sites. A process for wild releases has now been approved in the UK. So we feel the future of beaver is now far more secure.

THREE YEAR OBJECTIVES

To continue arranging translocations from Scotland, and any other locations where beavers may become problematic. Continue lobbying for free release status in England and Wales. This work will continue but outside the Species Recovery Project

BEAVER LATEST NEWS AND UPDATES

Latest News

The UK Government has approved licensed wild beaver releases in England via a new Natural England licensing process, which began accepting applications for projects meeting specific ecological criteria in early 2025. This is a huge step forward and was something that Keep it Wild and its partners has been lobbying for.

There are estimated to be more than 2500 beavers living wild in the UK. Recent notable sightings even include on the Thames.



Beaver releases do not occur during the summer, but the next beaver releases are due to take in the spring of 2026 at:

- Nattergal and High Fen
- West Acre Estate

Beaver movements and releases like this are coordinated with the Beaver Trust.

WILD CATS



BACKGROUND

Wild cats were once widespread across Britain. The passing of the grain preservation act in 1566 was a major turning point, leading to a bounty on the head of wild cats. Today they cling on in a fragmented population of 30-300 individuals in the Scottish highlands. They hunt small mammals mostly rabbits.

CURRENT STATUS

There are now several captive breeding sites in the UK including at Coombeshead in Devon and our satellite site at Canwood in Sussex. Between the sites there are approximately 50 breeding animals. The first release of animals took place in the Cairngorms in 2023 after a decade of captive breeding. Fifteen kittens were born in 2024.

NEXT SIX MONTHS OBJECTIVES

To continue to build up our stock of breeding animals. Preparing for wild releases in Devon. To build further cages at Coombeshead and Canwood to host the expanding group. Add additional cages at 42 acres in Somerset.

THREE YEAR OBJECTIVES

To enable wild releases in Devon and possibly other sites. Releases will be of 30 individuals. The first planned release will be in North Devon in 2026 and public consultation is already underway.

WILD CAT LATEST NEWS AND UPDATES



Latest News

A further 15 kittens were born in 2025 we have been splitting the cats across our three sites to ensure genetic diversity.

We are also working hard to secure a further 4 cats from Europe with completely fresh genetic lines, this process is ongoing. Should this be achieved, we will require our own quarantine facility and funding for this has kindly been donated by the Kairos foundation.



WILD CATS AT 42 ACRES SOMERSET 1



Latest News

Our 4 sisters have spent most of the summer hiding away in fresh vegetation, its been a scorcher, and as the temperature has cooled they have revived appetites, and filling out their winter coats. They will be going back into the breeding programme this winter.

Our boys have been replaced by two young kittens. After a very reticent start, they are eating like adults, growing rapidly, starting to climb, running around like lunatics around the pen....but all away from human gaze. We have only seen them on trap cameras since they arrived.

BLACK GROUSE



BACKGROUND

The black grouse was once common across the UK. Found in numbers where woodland borders open moorland. The species is now largely confined to Scotland with isolated populations in Northern England and Wales. Deforestation and intensive sheep grazing, drainage and land-use change all influenced the decline.

CURRENT STATUS

We are sourcing a breeding flock of Black Grouse from a world expert in their captive breeding. They require a drained sloping area to breed, with regular movement of the birds to new areas where grass is sufficiently long. A site has been identified at Coombeshead and is being cleared and prepared, protective pens are being built.

NEXT SIX MONTHS OBJECTIVES

The program was delayed by one year after the the breeding pens constructed in 2024 were damaged by storm Daragh. A new set of pens of a more rugged construction have been built and are now complete the first 20 birds will arrive in October 2025.

THREE YEAR OBJECTIVES

To have optimised a breeding regime, and increased the flock to a size suitable to allow wild releases in Year 3.

BLACK GROUSE LATEST NEWS AND UPDATES



Latest News

The Black Grouse breeding pens were completed in November 2024, but damaged by storm Darrgh in December 2024. This has forced a redesign and complete new pens have been constructed. During 2025. Working with world expert in the breeding of black grouse Gordon Bowker, we have trained our staff in their up-keep and we look forward to welcoming 20 birds in October 2025 to begin the breeding program.

TURTLE DOVES



BACKGROUND

The turtle dove was once common across most of Britain. It has undergone a 99% decline since 1960. Agricultural intensification, with seed bearing weeds wiped out through herbicide use has eliminated their food source. Additionally thousands are shot during their annual migration to and from West Africa.

CURRENT STATUS

A turtle dove aviary already exists at Coombeshead and hosts a small number of birds. Two additional release aviaries have been constructed at Coombeshead and Canwood and are populated with birds. The birds will over winter in the aviary. There are now over 120 birds held in these aviaries. The aviaries are being carefully monitored to exclude rodents and predators.

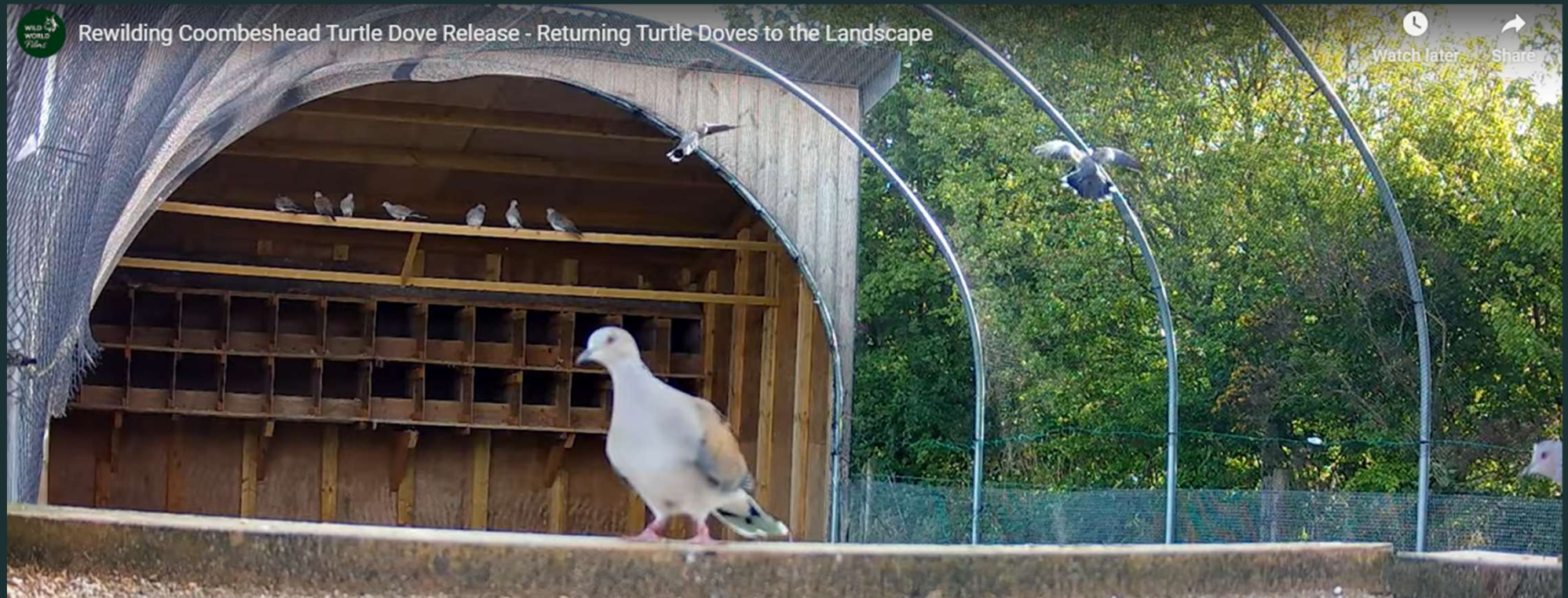
NEXT SIX MONTHS OBJECTIVES

The birds will be released in the spring at Cannwood and Coombeshead. Arable seed will be sown first to provide suitable habitat for them. It is hoped the birds will remain local to both sites during the spring and summer, then fly to Africa to over winter, returning to their host sites the following spring.

THREE YEAR OBJECTIVES

We hope to establish flocks at Coombeshead and Canwood that will migrate and spend summers permanently at each location.

TURTLE DOVES LATEST NEWS AND UPDATES



Latest News

This summer a total of 100 turtle doves were released from two aviaries, one at Rewilding Coombeshead, the other at Cannwood. The flocks spent the summer staying close to the release site feeding in the rewilding land on the ample seed available. There was also nest building activity. By the autumn the flocks started their migration to North Africa and we hope to see them return in the spring of 2025. There will be supplementary releases in 2026 and 2027.

TURTLE DOVES LATEST NEWS AND UPDATES 2



Latest News

You can watch an inspiring video about the turtle dove release of 2025 at

[Rewilding Coombeshead Turtle Dove Release - Returning Turtle Doves to the Landscape - YouTube](#)

TWITES

In 1999 there were an estimated 1000 pairs of Twite in England, by 2021 there were 12 breeding pairs!



BACKGROUND

Twite are small finches that feed on seeds. They nest on moorland. They need cover in which to build their nest, as well as plenty of wildflowers to provide the seeds they eat and feed to their young. The UK's twite population has declined dramatically in recent decades, particularly in England where they're on the brink of extinction as a breeding bird. In winter

CURRENT STATUS

We have established a breeding flock with OC Aviary. We had 6 pairs, of which 5 bred successfully and have produced us a total of 15 young in 2024, doubling our population in year 1! We have sourced additional adult birds and go into year two with 12 breeding pairs. We have constructed new aviaries to house the birds.

NEXT SIX MONTHS OBJECTIVES

During November we begin keeping the birds as a single flock which allows them to perform communal behaviours and begin identifying potential mates. We add more variety in their diet, including small volumes of insects, and a wild seed mix containing grass seeds. The birds will pair and be transferred to nesting boxes for breeding.

THREE YEAR OBJECTIVES

We hope for wild releases in 2026.

TWITES LATEST NEWS AND UPDATES

Latest News

The 2025 Twite breeding season has been a challenging one yet has brought success and a wealth of knowledge to build on for future years.

The Twites were made into their breeding pairs in early April, with a clear intent on ensuring any young produced would be as genetically diverse as possible. 11 pairs were made. After a slow start, signs of breeding including nest building, mating displays and allopreening were observed towards the end of April. The first egg was laid by an adult pair on the 25th of April, however these eggs were sadly infertile.

The first chick hatched from a young pair (bred 2024) on the 15th of May, only one egg was fertile in this clutch, but the chick was reared to fledging. Around this time, most of the pairs had begun to breed and were laying eggs, however the weather began to cause complications with this. Day time temperatures would fluctuate between 28-35°C, and a spell of no rain created a challenging environment for the birds to breed in.

This extreme weather persisted from mid-May to mid-July, with no rain and extortionate heat. Over the time, very few eggs were developing to full-term, and very few chicks successfully hatched. The reason for this was that eggs were either overheating or dehydrating, making it extremely difficult for the fragile embryos to survive. Additionally, when chicks would hatch, there was an increased mortality rate due to dehydration. To combat these issues, the aviaries had a large extractor fan installed and a large mesh window, providing constant airflow. Whilst this helped maintain a consistent (albeit high) temperature, a severe lack of humidity continued to cause problems. To combat the humidity issue, I provided 24/7 access to baths for the adult birds; and misted eggs with water every few days. This helped slightly; however, they would soon dry out again. To help with hydration of chicks, the parents would be provided with fresh germinated seed and “Perle Morbide” rearing food, which holds a large volume of water. This helped with hydration and saw more chicks being successfully reared from hatch as a result.



2025 Season nesting birds



TWITES LATEST NEWS AND UPDATES

Latest News Continued

As this 8-week spell was during the height of the breeding season, it has led to a smaller volume of chicks being produced as was initially projected. To increase the likelihood of success next season, I suggest that an air-conditioning unit would be an invaluable purchase.

Additionally, some other challenges were faced this season, please see the challenge below and the mitigation plan:

Illness in young birds after weaning

- House when moulting in plastic cages with mesh grills over the floor to stop consumption of spoilt food and/or droppings.

Abandonment of chicks caused by motivation to breed again

- Remove all nest sites immediately once the chicks have fledged until they are independent enough to live without parents.

Poor parenting

- Pair experienced birds to inexperienced birds, allow for natural mate choice, canaries on standby as foster parents.

Egg binding in hens

- Provide liquid and solid calcium supplements for hens when they are building nests. This will provide calcium needed for shell formation and contractions when birthing the egg. Also mix wheatgerm oil in their seed when laying.



TWITES LATEST NEWS AND UPDATES

Latest News Continued

As of August, there are still several pairs rearing chicks, therefore I'm hopeful that we may achieve double figures of chicks bred if they are reared successfully.

Overall, whilst this season hasn't been a huge success for numbers produced, it has provided invaluable husbandry information to help guide captive Twite management in future years. Much of this guidance is only possible to learn through trial and error with a larger volume of birds, therefore next year should hopefully be a lot more successful.



RED BACKED SHRIKE



BACKGROUND

The red backed shrike was essentially lost as a breeding species in the UK by the 1990s. It is now a passing visitor to western coastal areas. Feeding on large insects, frogs and small rodents, from a prominent perch. It is known to impale carcasses on thorns to form a larder, hence its common nickname the 'Butcher' bird.

CURRENT STATUS

The birds will initially be bred and managed by Oliver Crowther at a satellite facility in Staffordshire. Currently Oliver is preparing aviaries and sourcing between 6-10 pairs of birds. He will produce a management and breeding regime that can be replicated at other sites.

NEXT SIX MONTHS OBJECTIVES

Aviaries have been completed in Staffordshire and Coombeshead. The five pairs of birds we thought we had secured were instead taken by a dealer at the last minute. This has impacted our program by a further year. We are now looking for alternative sources.

THREE YEAR OBJECTIVES

Chicks born in Staffordshire in 2025 will transfer to the aviaries at Coombeshead, and we will replicate the breeding strategies. Wild releases are hoped for in 2026.

SHRIKE IN THE NETHERLANDS

As part of our research into breeding shrike, we interviewed existing breeders in the Netherlands and studied the decline of the Shrike there.

‘Belonging to the family of shrikes (Laniidae). Both the great shrikes and the real shrikes. Unfortunately the position of the shrikes is in poor condition in the Netherlands. The only breeding bird (the gray shrike only breeds in a few pairs), the red-backed shrike, is classified as a rare breeding bird and as a highly endangered species. And then 67% of this species breeds in Drenthe. There are still about 350 red-backed shrike male breeding pairs of red-backed shrikes nationally.

How different was it during the publication of the 5th edition in 1942 of "the Bird Year", the beautiful book by Dr. Jac. P. Thijssen. There it is also described about the red-backed shrike: "You can find those shrikes everywhere where thorn bushes grow: in and along the dunes, where they mostly hang out in the hawthorns and sea buckthorns, while in the east of us they land more in the blackthorn houses. Nowhere have I seen them so many and so well as in the Achterhoek" Times are changing! Some birds are doing better now, but most species, such as the red-backed shrike, are doing much worse. ‘



SHRIKE CAGES AND HUSBANDRY

Shrike aviaries have been constructed at OC Aviary in Staffordshire, and are nearing completion at Coombeshead. We have secured 6 pairs of birds which arrive in January.

Aviary Details:

8ft long x 4ft wide x 7ft tall.

3 solid sides with open front + feeding station.

Half solid & half Perspex roof.

Vermin proof floor (concrete or mesh).

Safety porch, allows access to feeding stations and entrance to each aviary.



Shrike Aviaries Coombeshead

ADDERS



BACKGROUND

Britain's only venomous snake is in serious decline since agricultural intensification through hedgerow and woodland removal reduced its habitat. It is now confined mainly to open moorland, woodland and coastal sites. It hunts small mammals, lizards and ground nesting birds.

CURRENT STATUS

We are in the early stages of our adder breeding programme which is taking place at Coombeshead. Three pens have been prepared to hold the adders, and the first 3 pairs of breeding stock adders have been sourced.

NEXT SIX MONTHS OBJECTIVES

Young adders were produced in 2025 and released into the rewilding area. An additional 3 pairs of adders has been sourced to increase our breeding stock.

THREE YEAR OBJECTIVES

To start the release of adders in year 3 at suitable sites, once sufficient quantity of snakes has been bred.

- **Prehensile tail:** They are the only British mammal with a prehensile tail, which is nearly as long as their body. They use their tail like a fifth limb to grip onto grass stems for
- **Distinctive coat:** Their fur is typically a golden-sandy or reddish-yellow color with a pale or white underside.
- **Agile climbers:** They are extremely active climbers, using their tails and specially adapted broad feet to climb up thin stems and stalks.

HARVEST MICE



BACKGROUND

Harvest mice (*Micromys minutus*) are Europe's smallest rodents, weighing as little as a 2p coin, with several unique adaptations for their life in tall grasses. Weighing just 4-6g, they weave intricate nests in tall grasses in which to rear young. They are agile climbers and their prehensile tail acts as a 5th limb. Changing agricultural practices have caused a 70% decline in the UK since the 1970s

CURRENT STATUS

We have been breeding and releasing harvest mice at Rewilding Coombeshead for many years, and typically release a hundred per year. Investment at Rewilding Coombeshead from the Species Recovery project will enable us to scale this to hundreds of mice released per year.

NEXT SIX MONTHS OBJECTIVES

We will expand our breeding facilities increasing the number of breeding pens that we have to facilitate producing more animals for release.

THREE YEAR OBJECTIVES

To increase our harvest mice annual release total to more than 300 per year within 2 years

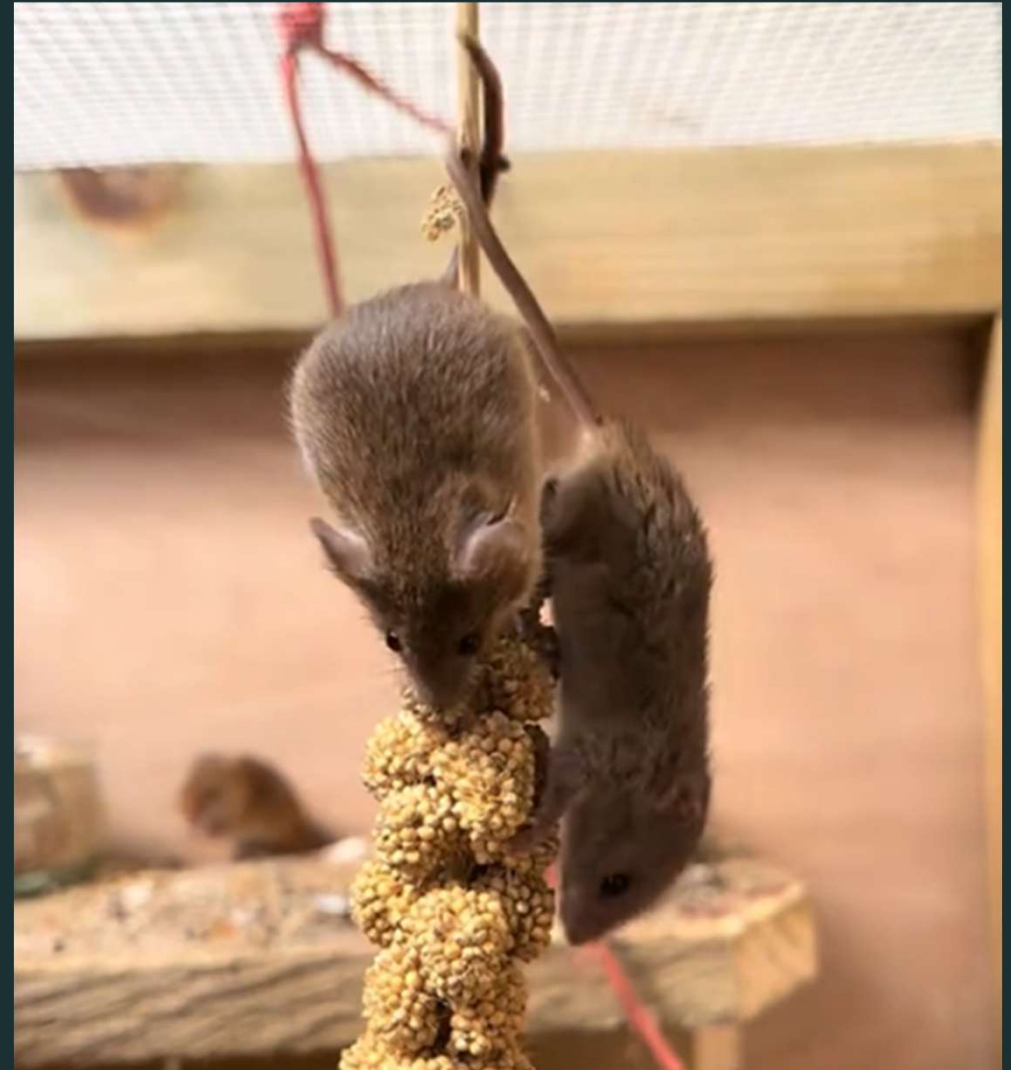
HARVEST MICE NEWS AND UPDATES

Keep it Wild see Harvest Mice as a totemic species similar to Glow Worms that will engage young people in conservation.

This is symbolised by the wide-ranging publicity received by Eva and Emily thirteen year old friends who crowd funded £4000 to breed harvest mice for release. They were supplied with the initial mice and advised by the husbandry team at Rewilding Coombeshead

[Harvest mice: 13-year-old friends on a mission to save the tiny creature - BBC Newsround](#)

[‘They’re beautiful’: 13-year-olds lead audacious project to save harvest mice in Devon | Wildlife | The Guardian](#)



MOLE CRICKETS



BACKGROUND

One of Britain's largest insects, the mole cricket naturally lives in wet meadows and damp moorland. Thought extinct due to agricultural intensification, drainage and pesticide use. A small population of 20 individuals was discovered in the New Forest in 2014.

CURRENT STATUS

We have sourced 76 mixed sizes of individuals. Breeding has been successfully achieved and we now have 65 newly moulted larvae to add to our stock of insects

NEXT SIX MONTHS OBJECTIVES

We want to build on our breeding knowledge of these insects. We expect to complete our insect breeding facility.

THREE YEAR OBJECTIVES

We hope to facilitate releases of mole crickets into suitable habitat on beaver wetlands in 2026. We hope to achieve more than 500 of these insects by 2026.

HISTORY OF MOLE CRICKETS IN THE UK



Song Chamber



Clutch of eggs



Instar Nymph

Mole Crickets UK History

Mole Crickets were once a widely occurring species, found in 33 counties, numbers have since dwindled and in the 1960s the crickets were considered to be rare and restricted to south England. Later records usually came from imports in compost or pot plants, and the species was declared as Endangered in the UK in 1987. In 2014, four males were recorded calling in the New Forest in Hampshire, this is now the only known colony in the UK.

Male mole crickets churr loudly by stridulating in order to attract females on warm nights from April onwards, having created specific song chambers at the entrance to their burrows. The sound chamber amplifies their call. The female cricket lays 100 to 350 eggs in an underground chamber in the spring. They hatch ten to twenty days later and she guards them for another two to three weeks. The nymphs moult six times and take from one to three years to reach maturity. Adults and nymphs live underground throughout the year in extensive tunnel systems that may reach a depth of over a metre in the winter. They are omnivorous, feeding on roots, tubers and rhizomes and a range of soil invertebrates. They often leave neat circular holes in tuberous plants

GLOW WORMS



Photo by George Turner

BACKGROUND

Once found shining along country lanes, meadows and gardens, glow worm numbers have dwindled. Agricultural intensification, pesticide use and light pollution are to blame. Glow Worms are actually a beetle and only feed as larvae on slugs and snails.

CURRENT STATUS

We have had a breeding stock of Glow worms at Coombeshead for several years, we solved the complexities of breeding these creatures. We are now looking to scale up the breeding to produce larger numbers to facilitate releases. Releases happened at Coombeshead, Heligan and Elvetham Hall during 2024.

NEXT SIX MONTHS OBJECTIVES

We have completed our insect breeding room and we are looking scale up our stock of glow worms to approximately 1000 individuals. We managed to breed 700 individuals in 2025

THREE YEAR OBJECTIVES

We hope to facilitate further releases in 2026 and 2027. We also hope to start to supply the schools and environmental groups with Glow worms for inspirational local releases.

OUR NEW INSECT ROOM IS NOW COMPLETE

Latest News

Our Glow Worm breeding program is going from strength to strength. Our insect animal husbandry team led by Izzy has successfully reared 700 glow worms!

We used glow worms from 6 different sites to do so to ensure genetic diversity and have 2 releases and 1 genetic bolster coming up.

2025 did not present easy conditions for successful breeding, our insect room was subject to prolonged periods of heat, and we needed to install air conditioning as a result.

We have new releases scheduled for Trewithen Castle in Cornwall in September with Kernow Primary school, and Southdowns in October; and a release for genetic bolstering at Hutchinsons Bank in Croydon for the London Wildlife Trust.





HELP US TO BRING BACK NATURE

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We bring back nature