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# KEEP IT WILD SPECIES RECOVERY CENTRE

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**DONOR REPORT**  
SPECIES RECOVERY CENTRE  
REPORT 7: JANUARY 2026



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 tetrrix)*

## Turtle Doves

*(Streptopelia turtur)*

## Harvest Mouse

*(Micromys minutus)*

## Red Backed Shrikes

*(Lanius collurio)*

## Twites

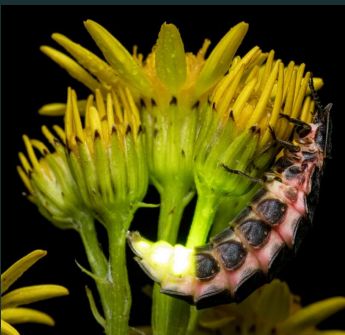
*(Linaria flavirostris)*

## 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 Gow's 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 September 2025 to January 2026.

The late summer period is inevitably quieter with no births to report. However, it has seen some notable milestones. We have successfully imported 16 new wildcats from Germany to help diversify the DNA of our breeding stock. We have finally taken delivery of three pairs of Red Backed Shrike to begin breeding. Our Black Grouse have arrived and have settled into their newly built breeding enclosures.

We have also received the exciting news that we will be providing the storks for the London Stork Project.

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. The following films were produced in this period

Wild Cats a Hopeful future

[Wildcats. A hopeful future with Derek Gow at Rewilding Coombeshead #wildlife #biodiversity #nature](#)

Glow worm breeding

[Derek Gow talks captive breeding and release of glow worms at Rewilding Coombeshead](#)

Other national media coverage in this period has included

Country life magazine

[Rewilding Coombeshead: Come Face-To-Face With Rare Native Breeds At Devon Spot](#)

Water voles in Seaton

[A Boost for the Water Vole Population at Seaton Wetlands - East Devon District Council News](#)

Wild Cats

[Wildlife Trust exploring reintroducing Wildcats in Devon, news via @RareBirdAlertUK](#)

London Stork Project

[White storks nest at Dagenham country park in rewilding project - BBC News](#)



# 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.

# SOME HIGHLIGHTS OF 2025

## Beavers

Eight Beavers Released

Sites include: Cefn Garthenor, Tregaron in Wales, Foley Estate near Liphook Hampshire, High Fen.



## Harvest Mice

400 Harvest Mice Released

Sites include: Washfield Wetlands, and Northamptonshire



## Glow worms

550 Glow worms released

Sites Include: London Wildlife, Hutchinsons Bank, Ducey of Cornwall Restormal Castle and in Alton



## White Storks

10 White Stork Released

Sites include: Tiverton in Devon



## Black Storks

Breeding flock established

Five chicks hatched this year



## Red Backed Shrike

Breeding Flock Established



# 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



**Beavers and white storks set to make a historic return to East London**

Monday 8 December 2025



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. The most significant of these next releases will be for the London stork project in conjunction with London wildlife Trust. It will see the release of storks reared at the Species Recovery Centre in Devon released in Dagenham near London. To prepare for this release we are planning a major improvement to our stork aviaries this winter. The flock will be split into two separate aviaries, and the size and height of each aviary will be increased.

# WHITE STORK LATEST NEWS AND UPDATES 2



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 west country

The image of stork number 45 was from a crop field in west Cornwall as recently as December 2025

Other storks from the release have been sighted in Spain on their migration to Africa, we hope they will return in future years.



# THE FLOCK AT REWILDING COOMBESHEAD



# 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

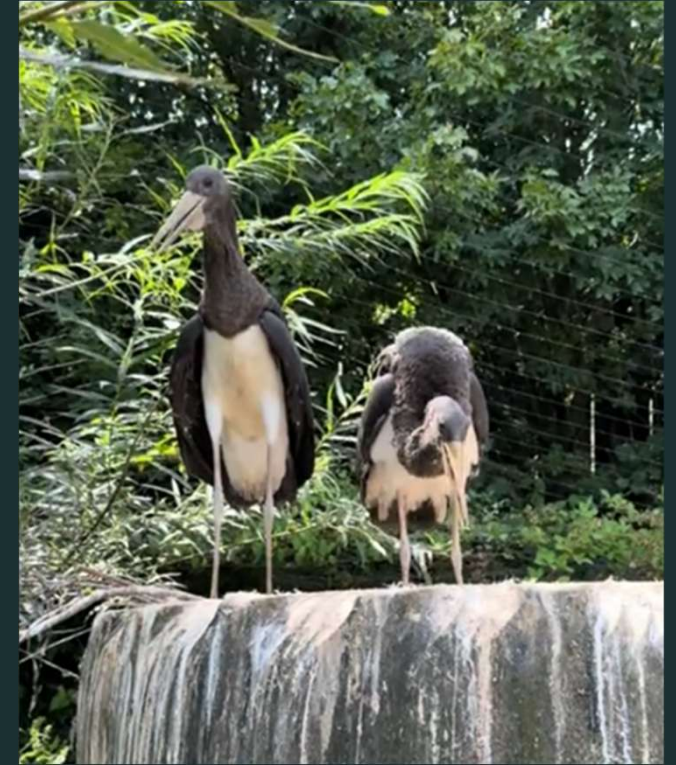
To continue our breeding program building our flock. There are now six breeding pairs. We would like to establish at least ten pairs producing enough chicks to facilitate releases.

## 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

Five pairs breeding pairs of birds have now been established. The spare males have been moved to West Acre Estate.

The last two years has seen consistent births, and we hope that we will soon be producing sufficient chicks to facilitate wild releases

# BLACK STORK NEW BREEDING PENS

We have completed 4 fantastic new Black Stork breeding aviaries in 2025



# 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 is being explored by Devon Wildlife Trust and public consultation is already underway. We hope to provide the cats for that release.

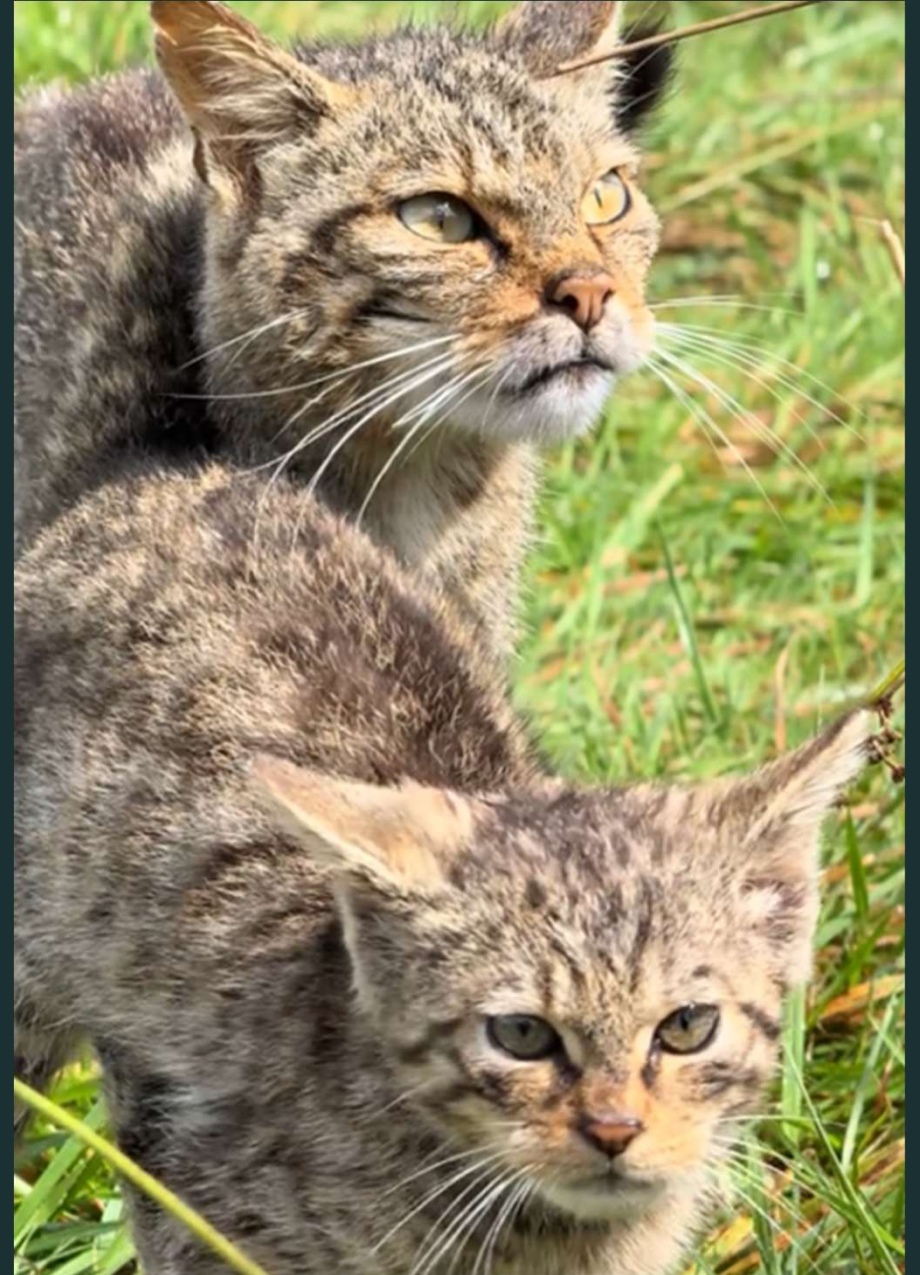
# WILD CAT LATEST NEWS AND UPDATES



## Latest News

We have managed to bring in an additional 16 wild cats from Germany to supplement the DNA of our wild cat stock.

The cats have been shared between our breeding facilities at 42 acres and Cannwood in Somerset and the main site at Rewilding Coombeshead



# WILD CATS RELEASE IN DEVON UPDATE

## Wildlife Trust exploring reintroducing Wildcats in Devon

by Devon Wildlife Trust



The wild release of cats in Devon facilitated by the Devon Wildlife trust is moving at pace.

A preliminary ecological reintroduction feasibility study on Wildcat reintroduction has been carried out by Vincent Wildlife Trust. This report concluded that there are regions which warrant further exploration for reintroduction, including the South West of England (Devon in particular), as well North and West Wales.

The project is now beginning to explore the feasibility of reintroducing Wildcats to Devon. This work will involve science and evidence assessments, as well as a social feasibility study and a comprehensive public engagement programme.

At every stage of its work the South West Wildcat Project is following guidelines established by the International Union for Conservation of Nature on the reintroduction of species.

We hope to host a conference on the subject in May of 2026 at Rewilding Coombeshead

# 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 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 have received 10 black grouse which are now settled into their new homes (as seen above). A further 10 are still held with Gordon.



# 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 Tiverton and Cannwood and are populated with birds. The first 150 birds were released in the spring of 2025 and have now emigrated to Africa and we hope to see them return in 2026.

## NEXT SIX MONTHS OBJECTIVES

Another batch of 150 birds are overwintering in the aviaries at Coombeshead, Cannwood and Tiverton. These will be released in the Spring of 2026 in the hope they will supplement the birds that may return from Africa from the 2025 release.

## THREE YEAR OBJECTIVES

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

# TURTLE DOVES LATEST NEWS AND UPDATES



## Latest News

This summer a total of 150 birds was released from three aviaries at Coobeshead, Cannwood and Tiverton. The birds stayed local, fed on seed in the rewilding areas and then migrated to Africa in the Autumn.

A new batch of 150 birds is now over wintering in the three aviaries ready for release in the spring of 2026. These will supplement the birds from the 2025 release that we hope will return in the spring.

# TWITES



## 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

The hot weather in 2025 created a difficult breeding season, and effectively a lost year in the program. Lessons have been learned and aviaries and environments adapted.

With additional stock sourced we now have more than 40 birds and expect more than 15 pairs for the next season.

## 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 2026/7.

# TWITES LATEST NEWS AND UPDATES

After a challenging breeding season from April to August, our Twites spent the following 2 months moulting together in a communal aviary. Losses were minimal through the moult, which was very pleasing, with this being a stressful and physically taxing period for birds. In November, an opportunity arose to reinforce our population with a further group of unrelated birds, taking our total population to 40+ for the winter. As of January 2026, losses over the winter have been minimal, and we anticipate that at least 15 breeding pairs can be made for breeding season.

## OC Aviary is Moving!!

With the expansion of KIWs bird conservation projects requiring Oliver's expertise, the lease of a larger facility in Derbyshire is in progress and is soon to be completed. The new site is a portion of a disused farmyard, belonging to the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust. The lease would see a large area of hardstanding, a spacious modern barn and a paddock be used for housing and breeding a variety of endangered native birds for KIWs reintroduction projects. Once the lease has been agreed, the development of infrastructure will commence to hold and breed larger populations of Twites, Turtle Doves, Red-Backed Shrikes, and potentially several other bird species in the future, for reintroduction.



# 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. Seven birds (three pairs and a spare male) have been sourced to date. These are housed in custom aviaries at OC Aviary.

## NEXT SIX MONTHS OBJECTIVES

Aviaries have been completed in Staffordshire and the pairs will be introduced in spring for breeding. We will continue to search for additional birds.

## THREE YEAR OBJECTIVES

Chicks born in Staffordshire in 2026 will transfer to the aviaries at Coombeshead, and we will replicate the breeding strategies. Wild releases are hoped for in 2027.

# SHRIKE UPDATE

After more than 18 months of searching between Oliver and Derek, Oliver was notified in November from a contact of his that several pairs of Red-Backed Shrike had become available from a keeper in the South-East. Due to the rarity of this opportunity, all available and suitable birds were immediately collected and are now held at Oliver's OC Aviary site in Derbyshire. Three pairs and a spare male are now overwintering in their own individual aviaries and are all in excellent health. Being only bred in spring 2025, all 7 birds had completed their juvenile moult at the previous owners and are now midway through their pre-breeding moult. The males are replacing their brown female-like plumage with beautiful grey, black and red feathers giving them a bandit-like appearance! All 7 birds are housed separately for safety reasons; however, pairs will begin being introduced to each other in April for the commencement of breeding in May.



# 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.

# ADDERS IN THE BREEDING TANK



- **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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 will collect more individuals in the spring to supplement our breeding stock.

## 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.

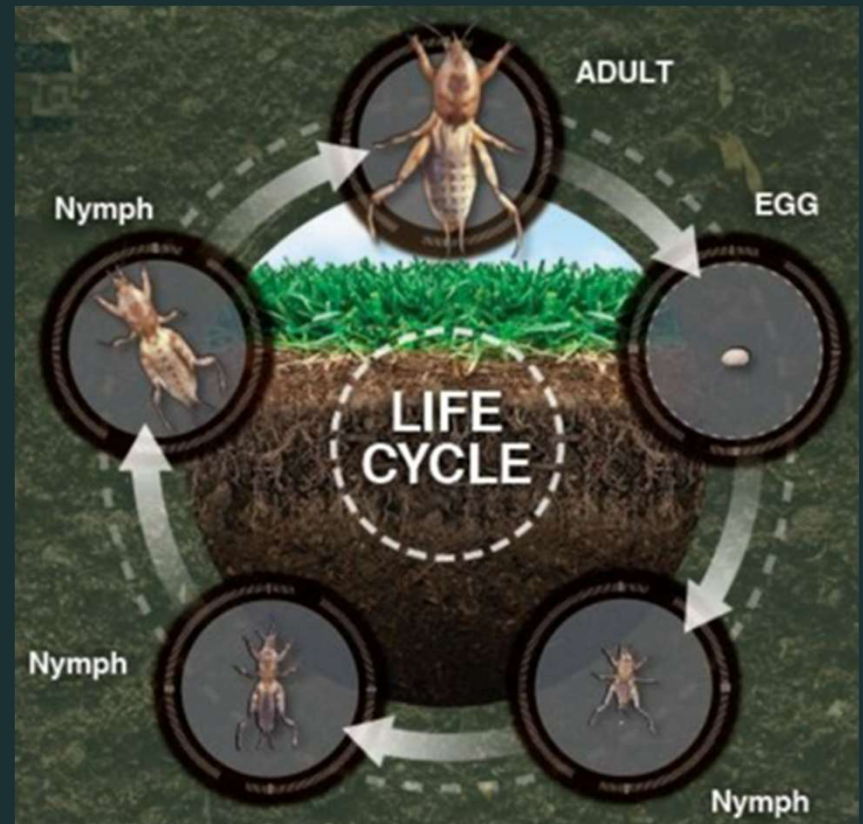
# MOLE CRICKETS LATEST NEWS



Our adult crickets are currently over wintering in their containers.

They feed on the roots of pea plants.

We have approximately 20 adult crickets, and hope to breed more than 10 pairs. Successful breeding will produce between 30 and 300 eggs



# 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 London Wildlife, Hutchinsons Bank, Ducey of Cornwall Restormal Castle and in Alton.

## 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

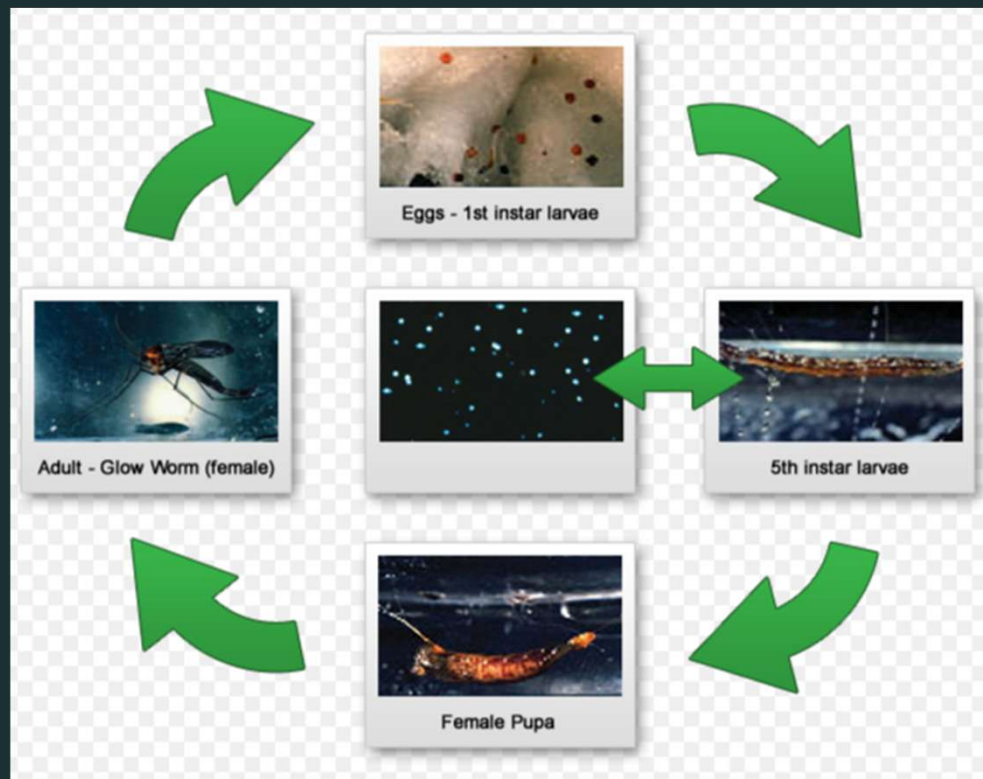
## Latest News

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 performed releases of over 550 glow worms at sites including for London Wildlife Trust at Hutchinson Bank, in Alton and for the Duchy of Cornwall at Restormal Castle.

Our stock are currently over wintering and will breed again in spring.

They are fed on Garden Snails and their life cycle is shown below.





HELP US TO BRING BACK NATURE

**KEEP IT WILD**

Woodlands Farm, Broadwoodwiger, Lifton, UK PL160JS

+44-07878750343 - KEEP IT WILD

Email: [nick@keepitwild.uk](mailto:nick@keepitwild.uk) Website: [www.keepitwild.uk](http://www.keepitwild.uk)



We bring back nature