

Largest ever Government investment in threatened species recovery

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A total £90 million funding for species recovery across England.

Hundreds of England's most threatened native wildlife are to be protected from extinction, thanks to the largest ever government funding for threatened species announced today.

The government will invest £60 million over the next three years - more than double the previous round of funding - into the Species Recovery Programme, marking the largest ever government investment in directly supporting threatened species. A further £30 million will be dedicated to fund species recovery on the national forest estate.

It comes as Defra unveils a new campaign, "Wild Again: Restoring England's Wildlife", which will encompass the government's existing and future work to protect and recover native species through projects including the flagship Species Recovery Programme.

The programme, run by Natural England, funds conservation projects including habitat restoration, captive breeding and species reintroductions, helping to tackle habitat loss, safeguard our fragile ecosystems such as ancient woodland and chalk streams, and restore nature-rich landscapes.

Successful projects set to receive funding for 2026-2029 will be confirmed by Natural England in May but early indications suggest the funding will support action across a wide range of species from birds to beetles, moths to mammals and spiders, snails and seahorses.

Environment Secretary Emma Reynolds said:

This Government is bringing threatened wildlife back from the brink with the largest ever investment in species recovery.

This long-term commitment is a decisive step towards reversing the decline of nature and protecting it for generations to come.

Natural England Chair Tony Juniper said:

If there is one positive thing about species decline, it is the fact that it is usually reversible. For decades Natural England's species recovery work has revealed how even the rarest of the rare can be brought back from the brink. The red kite, lady's slipper orchid, pool frog, beaver and large blue butterfly are among the examples that demonstrate the many opportunities at hand.

Through the proven winning mix of good science and effective partnerships we know that many species can be restored to favourable status. This new government funding is most welcome, and will enable us to support even more of the many initiatives underway

across England to halt and reverse the decline of our wonderful wildlife.

Over the past three decades the programme has helped protect over 1,000 species and prevented the national extinction of at least 35 species. More than 600 species benefited from conservation efforts by the programme between 2022-2024, including water vole, hazel dormouse and oystercatcher. Among the key successes were the first red-billed chough to hatch in the wild in Kent for over 200 years, the successful reintroduction of black grouse to the North Yorkshire Moors, and the return of the large marsh grasshopper to the Norfolk Broads after an 85-year absence.

England is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world. Since 1970, wildlife populations have fallen by a third with one in six species at risk of extinction. The funding uplift will help support the government's mission to reverse this decline and meet our legal targets set out in the Environmental Improvement Plan, which commit to halting the decline in species abundance by 2030 and reducing species extinction risk by 2042 against 2022 levels.

The government has already announced the largest nature friendly farming budget in history, with £11.8 billion to be spent across this Parliament, the creation of three new National Forests, and approved the first wild beaver releases since they were hunted to extinction around 400 years ago.

Additional information:

- The majority of applications for Species Recovery Programme funding are still undergoing assurance. These projects will be considered at the Programme Board in May, after which funding decisions and announcements for that group will be made later in the month.
- Examples of successful projects delivered with funding from the Species Recovery Programme:

Hawkshead bee in Hastings

The species highlight of the project was the discovery of *Andrena fulvago* (Hawksbeard Bee) by ecologist Andy Phillips. This rare species had not been recorded in Hastings for over 100 years. The wildflower areas created by Groundwork South will help support this rare bee species, along with many others.

Chough in Kent

The successful reintroduction of Chough in Kent for the first time in over 200 years following an extensive captive breeding programme and supervised release and monitoring. The success of this project, carried out by Wildwood Trust, Kent Wildlife Trust, and Paradise Park was demonstrated by first wild hatched chick in 2024, birds nested again in 2025.

Black grouse on the North York Moors

The successful translocation and reintroduction of breeding black grouse on the North Yorks Moors saw new nests hatched and 15 birds fitted with radio transmitters to monitor movements and health. This project will also release further individuals this year as part of the grant extension.

Adders in Berkshire

Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust installed two adder tunnels beneath the Old Thornford road in Berkshire which bisected Greenham and Crookham commons. The tunnel was completed in March 2024 and additional habitat enhancements were made to help direct adders towards the tunnel

entrances instead of the road. In May 2025 trail cameras installed at the tunnel entrance caught evidence of an adder using one of the tunnels.

Horseshoe bats in Sussex

Vincent Wildlife Trust has worked on three disused buildings to make them ideal for bat breeding. Their project Horseshoes Heading East focussed on connecting up suitable breeding and hibernation places for greater horseshoe bat across Sussex. Greater horseshoe bats at one of the sites have successfully bred, with mums and pups in the incubator and a new attic space.

Waders in Essex

The RSPB and Essex Wildlife Trust worked together across wet grassland, grazing marsh, reedbeds and saline lagoons in the Blackwater and Colne Estuary to install predator fences and water control features to make the site even better for breeding waders. The works have already proved successful with a lapwing nest spotted this spring and 6 other lapwing were seen displaying, as well as a pair of redshank.

Lady's slipper orchid in Yorkshire

Natural England has worked with Royal Botanic Gardens Kew and Plantlife for thirty years collecting thousands of seeds, conducting germination trials and growing on seedlings to try and bring back our most impressive and rarest orchid, the lady's slipper. Now, with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust also part of the partnership, the first known example of this rare and beautiful plant naturally propagating in the wild has been recorded.

Avocet in Worcester

Upgraded islands within the lakes at the reserve at Upton Warren, which had eroded over time, have received positive responses from the visiting birds, with 57 Avocet recorded on the 28th March '25. This is a fantastic outcome given the short timeframe over which this project has been delivered by the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust.

Water voles in Northamptonshire, Cheshire, Nottinghamshire and Warwickshire

Four Species Recovery Programme projects have created habitats for water voles in Northamptonshire, Cheshire, Nottinghamshire and Warwickshire including creating new bankside habitat, wetlands and ponds, and planting hedges to provide cover and food plants. Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, aided by contractors and volunteers, installed twenty water vole 'motels' along the banks of the canal in Coventry to provide safe resting and feeding places. In addition, more than 420 water voles were captive reared and released to help increase population numbers and distribution.

Atlantic salmon and pearl mussels in Cumbria

West Cumbria Rivers Trust, working with the Freshwater Biological Association delivered river habitat improvements including removing barriers to the passage of Atlantic salmon. This also benefitted pearl mussels, as their larvae spend around 9 months of their lifecycle on the gills of either salmon or trout, before dropping off into gravels to continue their growth. 2475 juvenile freshwater pearl mussels were released under licence into streams in Cumbria to bolster the populations.

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