

Press release: Landscape protection confirmed for Cornwall's rare species

Rare species like the marsh fritillary butterfly and willow tit bird have been given a conservation boost today, with Natural England officially recognising the Mid Cornwall Moors as one of the country's most important wildlife sites.

Following a four-month public consultation, Natural England has confirmed the designation of the Mid Cornwall Moors as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), giving the area legal protection for its important wildlife and habitats.

This brings certainty and purpose to conservation work in Mid Cornwall, where the rich mix of heathland, woodland, and wildflower meadows provides a vital sanctuary for wildlife.

Wesley Smyth, manager of Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly team in Natural England, said:

This rich and diverse landscape of Mid Cornwall is home to an array of rare plants and insects, alongside one of the highest densities of willow tit breeding pairs in England.

That's why we've designated this area as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, recognising its vital contribution to our natural heritage and helping its precious wildlife thrive for generations to come.

Natural England is working with landowners and local organisations, such as the Cornwall Wildlife Trust and Butterfly Conservation, to create the perfect conditions for the rare marsh fritillary butterfly. With further help from the Eden Project and Highways England, swathes of devil's-bit scabious – the main food plant for the marsh fritillary caterpillars – have been grown and planted alongside the A30 road corridor.

Philip Hambly, Chairman of Cornwall Butterfly Conservation (CBC), said:

CBC have been working with Natural England in order to help protect the rare Marsh Fritillary butterfly in Mid Cornwall, and this confirmation of SSSI protection will help future conservation efforts. If we want to protect our rare species such as this, we must manage their habitats carefully and make sure that we are doing so on a landscape scale.

As part of the area's newly-designated status, another project seeks to

protect the habitat of the willow tit, which has virtually disappeared from large parts of the UK and whose national population has declined by an estimated 81% since the mid-1990s.

The Mid Cornwall Moors SSSI merges six former SSSIs that previously dotted the landscape around the A30 and east of Indian Queens. The new designation has extended those boundaries and protects around 50% more countryside, connecting important habitats and helping wildlife to withstand pressures from climate change.