

Press release: Bats and churches to benefit thanks to National Lottery

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has approved the development stage and initial funding of £3.8million for the 5 year "Bats in Churches" partnership project, bringing together wildlife and heritage conservation and church organisations to save bats and protect churches.

The ground-breaking project will:

- trial and perfect new techniques to enable bats and church congregations to live together
- build up professional expertise and volunteer skill to share the best solutions with hundreds more churches
- bring together church communities and bat enthusiasts to create a shared understanding and appreciation of England's historic places of worship and our rare flying mammals

Natural England's Chairman, Andrew Sells, said:

This is a splendid result for both congregations and bats, who have shared churches for centuries but not always happily. We've been working very hard for a number of years with our partners to find ways to help bats and people coexist peacefully in these beautiful, historic buildings. This funding will allow us to capitalise on that good work and find innovative new ways of resolving the conflict. It will provide a lasting legacy for these wonderful churches and the people and bats that rely on them.

The project will provide help and support to places of worship across England where large bat populations can sometimes have a negative impact on historic buildings and the communities who use them.

HLF's CEO, Ros Kerslake, said:

We welcome this unprecedented co-operation between church leaders and bat conservationists. It's a positive move forward and should provide a practical solution to what has become a national problem.

Bats in Churches' is being made possible thanks to National Lottery players' money. The legacy of our £3.8m investment will be a major step change in how this issue is approached in the future. Local communities who work hard to look after and use their churches, precious bat populations and historic church buildings are all set to benefit. The most immediate outcome is developing proposals for 100 churches in England to put in place solutions to protect

resident bat populations whilst preventing further damage to the buildings.

The UK has internationally important populations of bats, which are at risk, because of decreases in woodland where some species hunt for insects, conversion of barns, loss of natural roosting sites and changes in farming practices. Due to significant historical declines in bat populations in the UK, all bats have been protected under British law since 1981. Churches can be important sanctuaries for bats for maternity roosts and hibernation.

Whilst small bat populations can occupy parts of a church without disturbance, in other cases bats can pose severe financial and social problems for congregations. At a time when churches are increasingly becoming community hubs with a diversity of events and uses, bat droppings can restrict activities, damage historic artefacts, cause hygiene issues and put strain on the volunteers who look after these beautiful buildings. In rare cases large bat roosts have even caused churches to close.

Rt Hon Sir Tony Baldry, Chair of the Church Buildings Council, said:

This grant should help us better manage bats in churches. We are not opposed to bats, they are intriguing creatures and part of God's creation, but they can do enormous damage in churches. I am delighted that this innovative project can now go ahead.

The partnership includes Natural England, Church of England, Bat Conservation Trust, Historic England and the Churches Conservation Trust.

Julia Hanmer, Joint Chief Executive of the Bat Conservation Trust said:

Bats have suffered massive population declines and churches provide important safe spaces for nine species to shelter. We are delighted that with this funding from HLF, church communities and bat workers can together play a significant role in supporting these vulnerable and fascinating species, whilst at the same time protecting historic medieval church buildings and opening church doors to wider communities.

Deborah Lamb, Deputy Chief Executive of Historic England said:

We welcome every opportunity to help congregations that work hard to care for church buildings, providing public space for community activity and a wonderful treasury of historic monuments, brasses, woodwork and craftsmanship. This project will offer practical help to those coping with the additional challenge of living with bats and encourage volunteers who are interested in bats to discover more about local churches.

Crispin Truman OBE, Chief Executive of the Churches Conservation Trust said:

Our national collection of 350 churches is home not only to great architecture, history and exquisite medieval art, but also to important natural resources including precious species of bats. The relationship between the two has not always been harmonious so we are delighted this project which celebrates both, has been awarded funding from the Heritage Lottery. It will enable us to better protect churches and their inhabitants, as well as supporting the communities who care for historic churches so that both can thrive.

Press release: Gloucestershire Man ordered to pay £675 for illegally fishing for elvers.

Yesterday (6 February 2017) Paul Ridler, of Betjeman Close, Gloucester pleaded guilty at Gloucestershire Magistrates' Court to one charge of fishing for elvers without the appropriate authorisation.

Mr Ridler was fined £250 and ordered to pay £400 in costs, along with a £25 victim surcharge.

The charge was brought by the Environment Agency contrary to section 27B (1) of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975.

On April 7 2016, Environment Agency officers were patrolling the River Severn at Ashleworth. Officers spoke to two males, Mr Anthony Ridler and Mr Paul Ridler. Anthony Ridler confirmed he had the required authorisation to fish for elvers but Mr Paul Ridler did not have authorisation and would not be fishing.

Later that evening officers returned to find Paul Ridler in wet, muddy waterproofs and gloves with an elver net and empty bucket. Paul Ridler stated he was looking after the net for his brother who was further downstream, and this was the only net they had with them.

Officers located Anthony Ridler who was in the river further downstream with a dip net immersed in water, and confirmed he was fishing alone and indicated he was not aware his brother was using the spare net.

Paul Ridler stated to one of the officers that he was not elvering and it was a "silly mistake, which would not happen again."

Speaking after the case, Carl Salisbury, the Environment Agency officer in

charge of the investigation, said:

We will continue to target those who decide to fish illegally without a licence or the correct authorisation and will work with other enforcement bodies to deal with the theft of fish.

Anyone witnessing illegal fishing incidents in progress can report it directly to the Environment Agency hotline, 0800 80 70 60. Information on illegal fishing and environmental crime can also be reported anonymously to Crime stoppers on 0800 555 111.

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Press release: National roll-out of new approach to great crested newt licensing

The new approach has been piloted in partnership with Woking borough council in Surrey. It has focused on bringing the greatest benefits to the amphibians while streamlining the licensing process for housing developers. The approach will now start to be introduced across the country after its roll-out was announced in the Department for Communities and Local Government's Housing White Paper today.

This new 3-year programme will survey areas where newts are most prevalent, map the potential impacts of development and propose local conservation strategies for the species in partnership. As part of the project, great crested newt habitat is enhanced or created prior to any development taking place, saving developers time and money, and making newt populations more healthy and resilient.

In May 2016, Woking borough council was awarded an organisational licence, allowing it to authorise operations that may affect great crested newts on development sites at the same time as planning permission, removing the need for expensive surveys prior to building works and individual licences to disturb newts if they are present. As part of the project, great crested newt habitat is enhanced or created prior to any development taking place, saving developers time and money, and making newt populations more healthy and resilient.

Natural England's Chairman, Andrew Sells, said:

We are grateful to DCLG for funding the national roll-out of this ambitious new approach to the licensing of great crested newts. It

is a ringing endorsement of Natural England's work to modernise the licensing of protected species.

Populations of great crested newts can struggle when they become isolated. Creating connected habitats across the country is the single most positive thing we can do for their survival, by allowing them to spread naturally.

At the same time, the strategic approach to licensing helps developers to avoid costs and delays to their projects. This roll-out is key to helping us ensure that regulation better serves both the natural environment and the economy.

Housing and Planning Minister Gavin Barwell said:

We are taking decisive action to support developers to build out more quickly so that we can deliver the homes this country needs.

This new approach to managing great crested newts will not only ensure the continued protection of this rare species and its habitat, but will safeguard developers from the delays, costs and uncertainty which have so often restricted the job of building new homes.

Great crested newts are rare across Europe, although can be locally abundant in the UK. They are protected by law, meaning that disturbance or damage to the newts or their habitat requires a European protected species licence. Currently, licences for this striking amphibian are issued on a site-by-site basis. National implementation of the new approach will benefit newts at population level across the landscape.

Dr Tony Gent, CEO of Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, said:

The regulations and planning processes that have been put in place to help conserve the great crested newt have too often failed to provide the long term conservation outcomes that they need to reverse the historic and continuing declines of its populations.

This new initiative provides an opportunity for real gains for great crested newts, by improving the way that regulations are applied. We are keen to work with Natural England on this initiative to ensure that real, sustainable benefits can be achieved for the species.

Stephen Trotter, Director, The Wildlife Trusts England, said:

I welcome the announcement of this funding – it's potentially great news for newts. Natural England has listened to concerns about how

the new system will be rolled-out and this funding gives some reassurance that the Government's commitment to the conservation and recovery of this declining amphibian is genuine. The Wildlife Trusts support the aims and objectives of the new approach. We strongly agree that everyone's priority should be to create new, joined-up habitats which will help the population of this fantastic species to recover. The Wildlife Trusts will work closely with Natural England to ensure the roll-out of the new approach is a success.

President of the Country Land and Business Association, Ross Murray, said:

The licensing process is one of the most cited sources of frustration and cost for our members seeking to invest in building homes or business premises in the countryside. The harm is particularly felt by those pursuing small scale developments.

This initiative has the potential to transform habitat preservation for important species, while at the same time reducing costs and uncertainty for landowners considering development across England.

We welcome the proactive way that Natural England has sought to address this problem and to Ministers for having the confidence to provide the necessary investment to roll this out.

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[Press release: Appeal after hen harrier disappears on north Yorkshire moorland](#)

Mick, a young male, fledged in Northumberland last summer. He was fitted with a satellite tag in July by a hen harrier expert from Natural England. His tag stopped transmitting on 21 December 2016 in the Thwaite area of North Yorkshire. A search of the area has been carried out but no trace of the bird or equipment has been found.

Natural England reported Mick's disappearance to North Yorkshire Police and is working closely with wildlife crime officers, local landowners, the Moorland Association and the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority.

The loss of another juvenile hen harrier brings the total to five within four months across northern England – and is a serious blow to the small English

hen harrier population. Interference with hen harriers is a criminal offence.

Rob Cooke, a Director at Natural England, said:

The disappearance of a hen harrier is deeply concerning to all who appreciate these rare and impressive birds. Any information that can shed light on what has happened to Mick will be gratefully received by North Yorkshire Police.

David Butterworth, Chief Executive at the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority said:

It's incredibly disappointing that the Yorkshire Dales' reputation as a wonderful place to visit is being damaged by incidents like this. We have pledged to provide whatever support we can to help the Police and Natural England find out what happened in this particular case.

Anyone with any information which could help police with their enquiries should contact North Yorkshire Police on 101, or Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111. Please quote reference number 12170014975 when passing information.