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# Species Recovery Trust Winter Newsletter

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## Record numbers of Tansy beetles!



Every year, the Species Recovery Trust supports 30 volunteers to survey a 45km stretch of the River Ouse in York to record the numbers of the rare and endangered Tansy beetle. This brightly coloured leaf beetle is found on sites where it can get its feet wet, with two small sites in the East Anglian Fens, and the largest population present in and around York along the river Ouse. The annual survey data is used to assess the number of beetles, as well as the size and location of its foodplant Tansy, and increasingly also Marsh Woundwort. This data is then transformed into maps and is sent to landowners and managers along the Ouse to help them improve habitat on their land for the beetle.

The improvements in management definitely appear to be working, as the 2023 survey saw a bumper year for Tansy beetles since surveying began over 10 years ago. Over 45,500 beetles were counted in 2023 which suggests a population of around 91,000 beetles. This is double the previous highest population estimate of 46,000 back in 2016; and more than 7 times the 2022 population estimate of 12,000 beetles. One key stretch south of the city saw 20,000 beetles counted by one surveyor! Hopefully future surveys will continue to demonstrate such clear successes for the recovery of the amazing Tansy beetle.

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## **Natural England funded Yorkshire Dales Field Gentian project draws to a close**

Two successive years of funding from Natural England's regional Species Recovery grant meant we could spend time studying Field Gentian sites and engaging land managers on privately owned land in the Yorkshire Dales, where previously we had very little data. Seven land managers with ten sites between them were contacted, who all responded and were happy to engage.





The first year of the project focused on gathering data, including grazing timetables, sward conditions and the land manager's thoughts on the area. The end of year report included a set of suggested management actions.

In 2023, we began to plan how to take forward the suggested actions with the land managers, which include adjusting grazing rates and creating exclosures. We also conducted more plant counts and sward surveys to monitor changes. The project has helped to highlight how critical cattle grazing is for the survival of Field Gentian in the uplands.



Although project funding is coming to an end in March, we are now in the great position of being ready to encourage and help the land managers to apply for grants to make and sustain the land management changes. This will include making the most of the new land management options that will be launched in the summer under Defra's revised environmental scheme.

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## **Preparations begin for our New Forest Cicada reintroduction project**

We are planning to travel to Slovenia in the summer to attempt to catch New Forest Cicadas to bring back to the UK for captive breeding, with the ultimate aim of reintroducing them into the New Forest. We have made great progress over the autumn and winter in preparing for the arrival of the cicadas. Paultons Park, our project partners, have been building enclosures at their site to house the cicadas when they arrive.







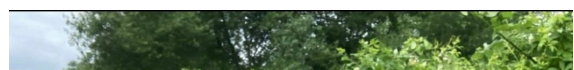
Cicadas nymphs burrow down into the ground and spend up to 10 years feeding on the roots of saplings and Molinia and so Paultons have sourced local saplings for the enclosures. We also spent a day digging up Molinia from a local Heath Lobelia site. The Molinia was encroaching on the Heath Lobelia and so by removing it we have improved the site for this rare plant - so a brilliant way to kill two birds with one stone! Finally, we spent a couple of days surveying potential reintroduction sites in the New Forest and have identified some fantastic sites where we plan to reintroduce some of the nymphs in the future.



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## Meet the Team - Dominic Price, Director

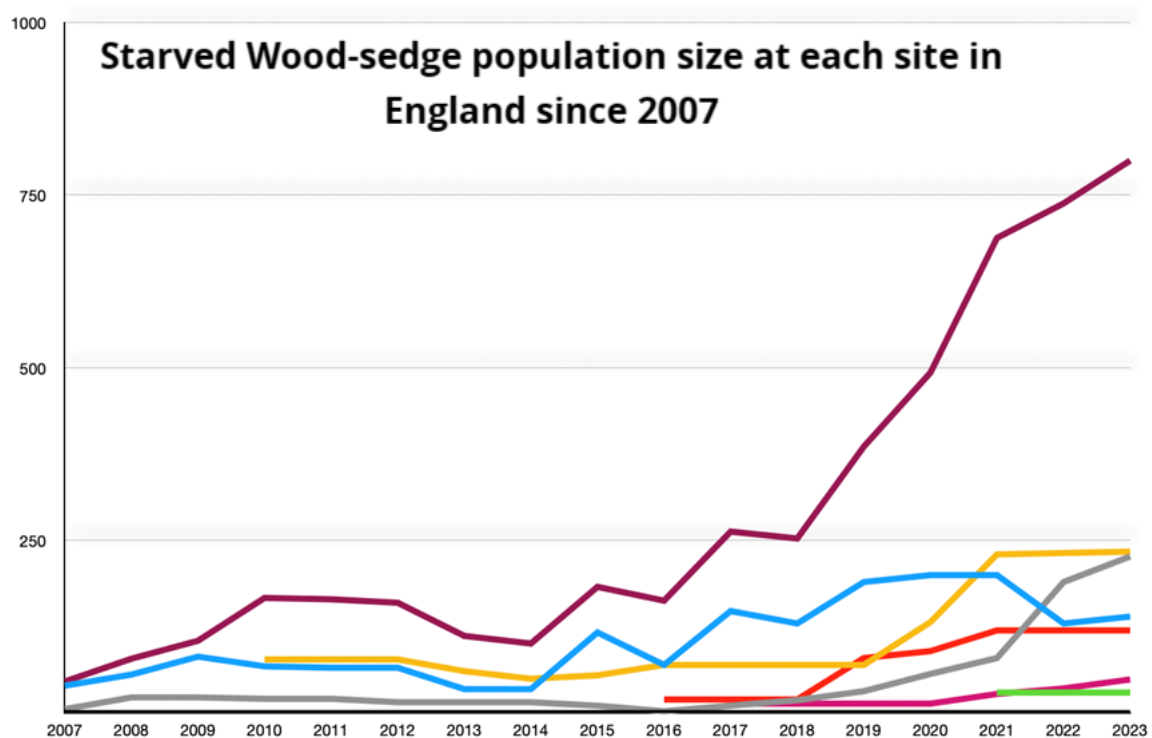
From a very young age I was



determined to help save the planet, and with a burgeoning enthusiasm for botany in my 20s I started planning a way to combine these two passions. The Species Recovery Trust was formed in 2012, and I'm hugely proud of the team we now have and the work we have achieved so far.

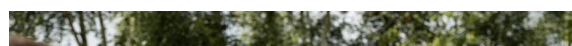


The key dogma of the charity was to run effective long-term conservation of the same set of species, with targets that spanned several decades, and hopefully eventually reach a point where we could genuinely say that we have saved them. I think this is best shown with this graph for Starved Wood-sedge; once the rarest plant in the UK and now well on its way to recovery after dogged work monitoring and managing the native sites, combined with re-introducing to sites where it has gone extinct. We're still only about a third of our way through our plans for this species!



My work is generally split into two threads – development and delivery of training courses, and species conservation. The training courses are a key part of my work and that of the charity.

I love them as I get to share my





enthusiasm for wildlife with a whole new generation of ecologists and conservationists, and the training income provides the sort of long-term secure funding that enable us to work on species like Starved Wood-sedge, without having to stop work when external funders change their conservation objectives, which unfortunately happens regularly.



Since lockdown I've become more and more enthusiastic for online training – which allows a level of detail we don't always get in the field and can cater for people of all abilities. I also get to write and record the background music to the tutorials, which is the nearest I am likely to get to being a rock star these days!

The training income sustains a base level of continuous work, and then when we combine this with external funding, we can achieve truly great things.



My work on the species recovery programme is primarily focussed on Dorset and Hampshire, with less constant work in further flung areas such as Norfolk and Cumbria. This means I get to spend most of my summers in some of the most spectacular landscapes in England, from the vast bogs of the New Forest to the windswept sand dunes of the Dorset coastal heaths. With our growing team of staff and fantastic volunteers we now have eyes and ears all over the country, which is a far cry from our first few years where I single-handedly tried to cover the whole country!

I feel incredibly lucky to do this job and be in a position where we can make a real difference to so many of the UK's rarest species. Highlights over the last

decade have been seeing Heath Lobelia return to the New Forest after targeting habitat management, seeing Forked Spleenwort growing in captivity and the birth of a potential new wave of re-introductions, getting around every Marsh Clubmoss site in England and Wales (which took over a decade) and so many of the training courses, particularly when it hasn't rained all day or involved us hiding to escape heatwaves!

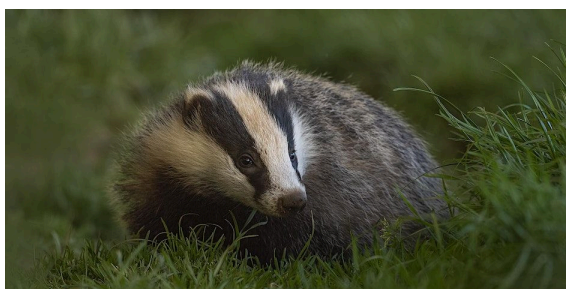
As we move into the next phase of our work, we are increasingly looking at filling gaps in the map and returning species to areas where they have become extinct. It's taken ten years for us to feel we know enough about the species to attempt this sort of work, and we are lucky that due to our funding model we can take this new work very slowly, learning from mistakes and successes as the programme rolls out across the country.

I'd like to thank you for your support over the years, and hope you'll be with us to see where we are in a decade's time!

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## Time for Training

We are delighted to say that our programme of training events continues to grow from strength to strength, and provides much of the funding to support our endangered species conservation work.



In 2024 we have added several new field courses to our calendar;

- Badger Ecology, Survey and Habitat Management
- Dormouse Ecology, Survey and Habitat Management
- Water Voles and Otters - Ecology and Survey

Meanwhile our online courses have been boosted with a brand new three-part course - 'Botany for Surveyors'. This is an immersive 12 hour course aiming to get people confident with over 200 native plants, as well as understanding the

get people confident with over 200 native plants, as well as understanding the main plant families we have in the UK.

[Click here for more information on our courses](#)



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