



Species Recovery Trust Winter Newsletter

Starved Wood-sedge rescue!

Starved Wood-sedge is one of the rarest plants in the UK, found only in two native sites, one of which is at Axbridge, deep in the heart of the Somerset Mendips.

Conservationists from the Species Recovery Trust have been caring for the plants for over two decades, but despite getting numbers back from critical levels, the plants have once again come under threat.

In the last few years the plants have unfortunately, and rather catastrophically, decided to move off the bankside habitat we have maintained for them, and started growing directly on a public footpath. This has put them directly in harm's way from being trampled.

We made the bold decision to remove the plants from the track and take them safely into captivity to allow them to be propagated and 'bulked up'. This means there will be enough plants to re-colonise the native site. It will also allow the trust to attempt to establish two new populations within the Mendips, in locations where the plants will be out of harm's way.





The work was made possible with funding through the Mendips Natural Area Landscape team.

Field Eryngo Project Update

Over the past few months, our team has had the wonderful opportunity to visit the last remaining Field Eryngo sites in southern England. These visits were made possible through the support of the Somerset Rare Plants Group, the National Trust, and Plymouth City Council.

Although we were disappointed not to rediscover Field Eryngo in southern Somerset—and to confirm that it no longer survives within the SSSI originally designated to protect it in south Devon—there have been hopeful moments too. A particular highlight was witnessing an impressive sweep of Field Eryngo thriving across Billicombe Meadows, where Plymouth City Council is managing the land for wildflower meadow seed production.



Our visits have also deepened our understanding of how each site is currently managed, as well as the management practices used in previous decades. This knowledge is vital as we work to create the best possible conditions for Field Eryngo to flourish.

Looking ahead, we are excited to continue collaborating with the National Trust and Plymouth City Council to learn more about how Field Eryngo spreads, especially as research suggests its seeds rarely germinate in the wild.

Winter Management in the South East



It's hard to believe we had such a hot summer now that it's January and we've experienced a week of sub-zero temperatures. However, the unusual summer produced disappointing results for many of the rare species we monitor in the south-east. To give these species the best chance in 2026, a series of habitat management days were scheduled. This included canopy thinning and scrub reduction for Spiked Rampion and Starved Wood-sedge in East Sussex and Surrey, and a day of scrub clearance for Marsh Clubmoss in Hampshire.

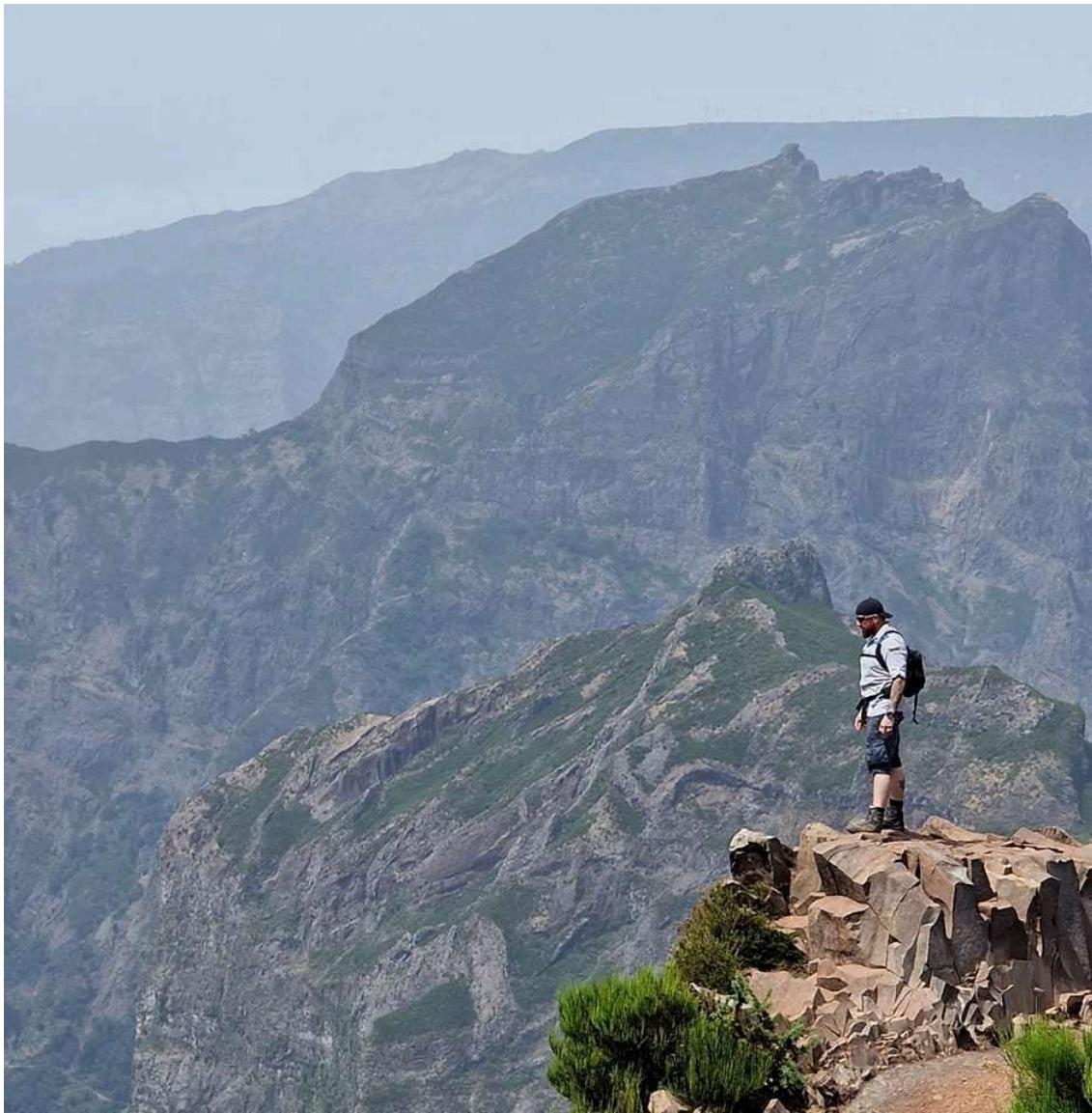
[Click here to find out more](#)

Meet the Team - Phill Robinson

I have been fascinated by invertebrates and reptiles for as long as I can remember, which led me to enrol in a BSc in Zoology in 2008. During my degree, I realised that I wanted my career to go in the direction of ecology and conservation, so I started volunteering with organisations such as the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, and The Conservation Volunteers where I was involved with practical conservation, habitat restoration, and species surveys, and then the North and East Yorkshire Ecological Data Company, where I was involved in processing historical records and formatting them ready to be added to the NBN Gateway.



After graduation, I spent a couple of years working as an Animal Health Monitoring Scientist before securing a job as an Aquarist at The Deep Aquarium Hull, where I have been for the last decade and am now a Senior Aquarist. Aside from the husbandry and scuba diving aspects of this role, I have also had the opportunity to play a very active role in The Deep's conservation output, particularly focusing on native Invertebrate species. One of the long-term outputs from this has been my involvement with the Tansy Beetle Action Group, where I met Vicky Wilkins, who offered opportunities to get involved in other conservation projects through the SRT. Some of these opportunities were outside The Deep's remit, so I started taking them on voluntarily because they sounded like really exciting projects. Recently, this led me to become a freelance Conservation Officer with the SRT, something I am incredibly excited and grateful to be doing.



Aside from the conservation focus, I also have an MSc in venom research, have published several papers and a textbook chapter on the subject, and am very keen on being outdoors doing things like bushcraft, hiking, and generally just being out in the wilderness.

Marsh Clubmoss in Dorset

This Autumn we carried out a census of every known Marsh Clubmoss population in Dorset. The Dorset heaths have historically been a stronghold for this species, but with general declines in the south of England we like to keep an eye on these sites, completing a detailed survey every 5 years. This time round the surveys also included all our recent trial transplant sites.



We can report that there are 46,486 plants in the county, scattered over 139 sites and sub-sites. Purbeck and the Studland Heaths (owned and managed by the National Trust) remains the county stronghold, with strong clusters of plants also found in Wareham Forest (Forestry England) and Holt Heath (National Trust). Both those areas were subject to fairly catastrophic arson attacks in recent years, and it was heartening to see that the wet heaths and the Marsh Clubmoss managed to survive these incidents. Overall the species is doing well in Dorset, with many thriving populations and roughly the same amount of new sites discovered as sites that have been lost.

One third of the transplant sites are doing well, and we are building up a more complete (although rather complex) picture of how best to do these translocations.

Time for training

If your New Year's Resolution is to learn more about the natural world, you are in luck, as we have a range of courses lined up for 2026 - both online and in person. To book on any of our courses, please visit the [SRT Eventbrite page](#).



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