



Vincent Wildlife Trust

10th December 2020

Vincent Wildlife Trust receives grant of £180,000 from the government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund

- 68 projects have been awarded grants between £62k and £3.8 million to kick-start a pipeline of nature-based projects while creating and retaining jobs
- First funding round sees £40 million pot allocated, second round of funding to open in early 2021

Vincent Wildlife Trust's project 'Future proofing horseshoe bat roosts in England against climate change' is one of the first environmental projects awarded a grant from the government's £80 million Green Recovery Challenge Fund.

Defra announced grants between £62,000 and £3.8 million today, to help create and retain thousands of green jobs. The projects, spread across England, will see trees planted - 800,000 in total - and protected landscapes and damaged habitats such as moorlands, wetlands and forests restored, alongside wider conservation work. The projects will also support environmental education and connecting people with green spaces.

Bats at risk from climate change receive a helping hand

The site of western Europe's largest colony of greater horseshoe bats is just one of a number of bat roosts in England to benefit from this vital new funding.

"The roosts cared for by Vincent Wildlife Trust are used by some 50% of Britain's greater horseshoe bats and a significant proportion of our lesser horseshoe bats, so the potential impact of this funding on the future of our horseshoe bat populations is significant," said Dr Lucy Rogers, Trust CEO.

Bats play a vital role in a healthy ecosystem as they are natural pest controllers. They are also useful indicator species: a drop in our bat numbers may indicate that all is not well in the insect world for example. Unfortunately, bats are also

vulnerable to the extremes of weather associated with climate change. This comes on top of catastrophic declines in all of Britain's bat populations in the last century.

Rather than sitting back and watching the 20th century decline in our bat species unfold, Vincent Wildlife Trust set about acquiring, managing and protecting roost sites of the rare horseshoe bats and has continued to do so for more than 30 years. Helped by the Trust's expertise and its innovative roost management techniques, both horseshoe bat species have started to show good signs of recovery, but this revival could be reversed by the climate crisis that now faces us and the likely increase in frequency of extreme weather events.

During the milder and wetter winters more commonly experienced in recent years, bats will often remain in the cool areas of their summer roosts rather than heading for their winter hibernation sites. Unfortunately, summer roosts are often less well-insulated and offer less protection. As a result, the bats that remain are vulnerable to sudden cold snaps. More frequent cold and wet weather in the spring affects roosting and foraging conditions, reducing the birth rate and the survival rates of young bats. As if this were not enough to contend with, many roof spaces become uninhabitable for bats during hotter and drier summers.

“By enhancing roosts using proven techniques such as the installation of hot and cool boxes to provide a range of stable microclimates, we can significantly reduce the negative impacts of climate change,” said Dr Anita Glover, the Trust's Bat Programme Manager. *“This funding could not have come at a better time to help us ensure the current recovery of our horseshoe bats is sustained.”*

The Green Recovery Challenge Fund is a key part of Prime Minister's 10 Point Plan to kick-start nature recovery and tackle climate change. The fund is being delivered by the National Lottery Heritage Fund in partnership with Natural England and the Environment Agency.

Environment Minister, Rebecca Pow, said:

“These projects will drive forward work across England to restore and transform our landscapes, boost nature and create green jobs, and will be a vital part of helping us to build back greener from coronavirus.”

“I look forward to working with environmental organisations as these projects help address the twin challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change, while creating and retaining jobs as part of the green recovery.”

Ros Kerslake, Chief Executive, National Lottery Heritage Fund, said:

“Supporting our natural environment is one of the most valuable things we can do right now. All these projects are of huge benefit to our beautiful countryside and wildlife, but will also support jobs, health and wellbeing, which are vitally important as we begin to emerge from the coronavirus crisis.”

The government’s forthcoming [Environment Bill](#) puts the environment at the centre of policy making to ensure that we have a cleaner, greener and more resilient country for the next generation. The fund is supporting a range of nature conservation and recovery and nature-based solutions projects, which will contribute towards government’s wider [25 Year Environment Plan](#) commitments, including commitments to increase tree-planting across the UK to 30,000 hectares per year by 2025.

EDITORS’ NOTES

For further information about Vincent Wildlife Trust and its work with bats, please contact **Dr Anita Glover** on **07810 020600** or email anitaglover@vwt.org.uk or hilarymacmillan@vwt.org.uk.

**This funding will cover selected bat roosts in the following counties:
Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Shropshire**

Background information

Established in 1975, Vincent Wildlife Trust (VWT) is an independent charity and a leading mammal conservation organisation with a track record of delivering high quality wildlife interventions, based on scientific evidence. We are respected internationally for our mammal research and our innovative evidence-based ways of halting and reversing declines in mammal populations. We are currently leading the reversal of the pine marten decline in England and Wales.

For more than 30 years, VWT has been a leading force in bat conservation, specialising in the conservation of the two horseshoe bat species found in Britain. VWT manages nearly 40 horseshoe bat roost reserves in Britain and Ireland.

The Trust works with other expert specialist bat groups and organisations across Britain, Ireland and mainland Europe. VWT is represented on the EuroBats Advisory Committee, which brings together 63 states and upholds the Agreement on the Conservation of Populations of European Bats. In 2018, VWT co-hosted the 3rd

European Bat House Symposium for researchers and conservationists, at which knowledge and best practice were shared across borders.

As well as delivering its own projects, VWT provides expert advice to partner organisations throughout the UK, Ireland and mainland Europe.

Further information can be found at www.vwt.org.uk

ACCOMPANYING PHOTO: *Greater horseshoe bat*: please credit Andrew McCarthy