Funding secures new bat project in Brecon Beacons

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Now thanks to funding from the Brecon Beacons Trust and Heritage Lottery Fund, local people will be able to find out just how important these bats are and how they can help the bats to thrive.

Our Beacon for Bats is a three-year project starting in the new year. The funding will be used to employ a part-time officer, develop the skills of volunteers and provide equipment and educational materials for the communities within the project area. The funding has come from two main funders - £52,000 from the Brecon Beacons Trust and £40,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Our Beacon for Bats is a project of national significance to be run by The Vincent Wildlife Trust (VWT), an environmental charity with offices in Brecon and Builth Wells. The VWT will be working with the local community to develop greater understanding of this secretive animal, to survey existing bat populations and to enhance this important bat landscape through the improvement of the bats' travel routes between roosts and woodland.

The VWT's Chief Executive, Natalie Buttriss, said: "We're all very excited at the Trust to know that this project is going to happen. We have been working in this part of the Brecon Beacons, a very special area for lesser horseshoe bats, since 1995. Now with the funding in place, we can share our work with local communities and find the missing links in the landscape that once in place will make this area an international showcase for these rare bats."

In-depth community research has been undertaken by the VWT over the last 12 months, to find out which groups and individuals might be able to help with or benefit from the project. A contact list of over 150 people has been developed. The Brecon Beacons Trust gave the VWT funding for this research and support from the community has been very encouraging.

Mrs Buttriss, continued: "The Vincent Wildlife Trust would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have helped the project to date - the response has been fantastic: from statutory bodies to local community representatives to local ecologists. Our next step is to appoint a project officer who will progress the project and work closely with local people."

A spokesperson from the Brecon Beacons Trust, said: "We are delighted to support this exciting and important project, knowing that with the VWT's track record in this area, the outcome can only be a positive one for the lesser horseshoe bat and local people and communities."

Jennifer Stewart, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in Wales, added: "Whilst not always considered to be cute or cuddly, bats are essential to our ecosystem and their dramatic decline in numbers clearly demonstrates the urgent need to protect and understand them."

Notes for editors

The Vincent Wildlife Trust is a charity engaged in wildlife research and conservation. Today the Trust continues to concentrate on the needs of rare British and Irish mammals, with current work centred on the bats, polecat and pine

marten. The Trust also manages 48 nature reserves in England, Wales and Ireland, most of which are bat roosts. There are eleven staff at the Trust including three based in Wales.

For eighteen years the VWT has been acquiring and adapting buildings as nature reserves for the lesser horseshoe bat, Rhinolophus hipposideros. The Trust now has 36 bat reserves for this species, ranging from small cottages to disused churches, and of these five are located in the Usk valley.

The estimated population of lesser horseshoe bats in the UK is 50,000. Of these 28,000 are found in Wales and of this figure an estimated 4,200 live in the area of the Usk valley – 15% of the Welsh population. This shows the importance of the area for this rare bat.

The lesser horseshoe bats
This tiny and delicate bat with its butterfly-like flight suffered a widespread and catastrophic decline in Europe during the 20th century, although it is now showing signs of recovery. Against this background, the populations in Britain and Ireland are now internationally important.

Although once distributed across southern England and as far north as Yorkshire, the lesser horseshoe bat in the UK is now only found in south-west England the West Midlands and Wales.

At dusk they leave the roost to feed, flying to areas of deciduous woodland, usually within two kilometres of their roost, by following hedgerows and tree-lines. Here they hunt in or below the tree canopy, catching their prey in flight or picking items off foliage. Lesser horseshoe bats mainly eat small flying insects such as midges; they also take crane flies, moths and caddis flies.

In winters lesser horseshoe bats hibernate in caves, mines, cellars or ice houses.

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported more than 28,800 projects allocating over £4.3 billion across the UK, including more than 1,800 projects totalling over £200 million in Wales.

Further information

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