Fly by night - Moths and bats take over Parliament

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MPs and Peers will be able to learn about the serious plight of these often misunderstood creatures, their vital role within the UK's delicate ecosystem and what is being done to protect them. They will also be able to meet the volunteers who are working hard to conserve moths, bats and their habitats.

Did you know…

Moths:

- Over 60 species of moth became extinct in the twentieth century
- More species have declined in southern Britain (75%) than in northern Britain (55%). South-east England has been particularly badly affected.

Bats:

- The mouse-eared bat was actually considered extinct in Britain until only recently
- The biggest threats to bats are loss of feeding habitats and flight lines; loss of insects to feed on; and building and development work affecting roosts.

Madeleine Moon MP, a passionate biodiversity supporter, is hosting the event with the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), one of the UK's biggest supporters of natural heritage, Butterfly Conservation and the Bat Conservation Trust.

Madeleine Moon, MP for Bridgend, said: "As we mark the International Year of Biodiversity (IYB), which aims to encourage people across the globe to safeguard their natural heritage, it is clear that human activity continues to be the largest threat. Moth and bat populations have decreased dramatically in the past few decades and this event will help highlight the problem and some of the ways we can all help."

The Heritage Lottery Fund has long been passionate about the UK's natural heritage and over the last 16 years has invested over £800million to safeguard some of our most threatened wildlife, habitats and parks.

Carole Souter, Chief Executive of the HLF, said: "This evening is going to be great fun but it raises a serious issue. Whilst not cute or cuddly, moths and bats are essential to our ecosystem and their dramatic decline in numbers clearly demonstrates the urgent need to protect them."

HLF investment has supported a number of key projects undertaken by the Bat Conservation Trust and Butterfly Conservation. In 2007, Sir David Attenborough launched an initiative to halt the alarming decline in Britain's moth population. The campaign - Moths Count – was made possible by an HLF grant of £806,000. The project encourages local communities to record moths in their areas and the information is being collated to create a vital tool that will map the numbers and species of moths in the UK.

Mark Parsons, Head of Moth Conservation at Butterfly Conservation, said: "There has been a surge of interest in moths in recent years. They are accessible nature, being found in every garden or back-yard. This has been a fantastic opportunity to raise the profile of these fascinating insects further and to highlight their importance in our ecosystem."

Count Bat, aims to introduce new people to bat conservation and was awarded an HLF grant of £596,000 in 2007. The project is successfully engaging local communities all over the UK in researching bats to create a nationwide picture of bats and their habitats.

Julia Hanmer, Chief Executive Bat Conservation Trust, explains: “Bats are inspiring yet vulnerable animals and thousands of Bat Conservation Trust volunteers and supporters are working with their communities to conserve bat populations and the habitats on which they rely. This evening is a fantastic opportunity for MPs to find out about the work going on in their constituencies and to see how important these unique animals are to the environment, people and to society as whole.”

Notes to editors

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 26,000 projects, allocating over £4billion across the UK.

Since 1994, it has invested **£800million** in projects that have safeguarded the UK’s countryside, wildlife and parks. Endangered species protected with the help of HLF grants include: basking sharks; red-barbed ants; water voles; and black grouse.

- HLF has awarded around £2.3milllion to moth and bat conservation projects.
- HLF funding has bought, protected of conserved over 70,000 hectares of land - over three times the size of the Isle of Wight.
- HLF aims to help more people get involved and learn about their heritage – last year more than 80% of the grants we awarded involved volunteers.

The United Nations declared 2010 the International Year of Biodiversity (IYB), a global initiative to increase awareness of the importance of biodiversity for our well being and to halt the loss of biodiversity. IYB-UK is a diverse network of organisations in the UK working together to monitor, conserve and celebrate the complexity of the natural world. In England, the IYB-UK initiative is supported by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and is being led by the Natural History Museum. HLF is an official IYB partner. www.biodiversityislife.net Twitter: @iybuk

The Bat Conservation Trust is the only UK charity solely devoted to helping bats and their habitats. BCT has almost 5,000 members. BCT also runs the national Bat Helpline: 0845 1300 228, which provides information and advice about bats.

Butterfly Conservation is the UK charity taking action to save butterflies, moths and our environment. Butterfly Conservation staff and volunteers survey and monitor species, provide habitat management advice, with particular attention being given to threatened species, and maintain a series of reserves. Butterfly Conservation has 14,500 members and is the largest organisation of its kind in Europe. www.butterfly-conservation.org.uk.

To find out more about moths.

Further information

Natasha Ley, HLF Press Office on 0207 591 6143 or natashal@hlf.org.uk Out of hours mobile: 07973 613820