Online mapping to save UK moths

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At the fourth annual Moth and Bat Evening held at the Houses of Parliament today, naturalist and broadcaster Nick Baker and leading environmentalist Chris Baines* will unveil the unique online mapping resource that will play an important role in assessing the fortunes of some of Britain's 900 species of larger moths.

The findings can be viewed at the Moths Count website and are the result of recorded moth sightings by thousands of members of the public. The data has been collated by the National Moth Recording Scheme as part of the Butterfly Conservation's Moths Count project which received funding of £806,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). The tool means that for the first time it is possible to map the distribution of moths across the UK which will provide the foundations for vital conservation initiatives leading in to the International Year of Biodiversity 2010.

Moths are an essential part of the UK's ecosystems with many of the UK's threatened bat species relying on moths as part of their diet. The Moths Count online mapping tool follows the success of the Big Bat Map which launched in August as part of the HLF funded Count Bat project. The Big Bat Map (also supported by of London's City Bridge Trust and Natural England) allows the public to log any bat sightings on the interactive map for everyone to see and so far it has helped the Bat Conservation Trust to flag bat hotspots and new roosts.

Nick Baker commented: "Bats and moths - these denizens of the dark require a certain amount of determination to understand and get to know better; but slowly we are and what we are finding is frightening. We've known bat numbers have been crashing for many years but what we were not aware of was that this may be linked to a massive slide in populations of some of what were regarded as our common garden moth species. Both of these highly tuned and environmentally sensitive groups of creatures can tell us a lot about the health of our world as well as making that world a more fascinating one for us to live in. Bats need moths and we need moths and bats."

Hosted by Madeleine Moon MP, the Bat Conservation Trust, Butterfly Conservation and the Heritage Lottery Fund, this year's Moth and Bat Evening will be widely attended by MPs and Parliamentarians including Lord Davies of Oldham, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra). Guests will be able to see moths and bats up close and the evening highlighted the plight of both threatened species that are essential to the UK's delicate eco-system.

Moths and bats have both been victims of negative perceptions, making them less desirable for attention than other endangered animals. Both are in significant decline; the numbers of moths has dropped by a third since 1968 while bats experienced a major decline throughout Europe during the last century.

Madeleine Moon MP, said: "This is the fourth year that I have hosted this event in Parliament, and I hope that good attendance from parliamentarians at the event will be an indication of the growing appreciation and understanding of the importance of biodiversity, and of moths and bats and vital indicators of the health of the UK's biodiversity."

Speaking on behalf of the HLF, leading environmentalist Chris Baines, said: "Anyone who remembers the long lost summer ritual of scraping moths of car windscreens will realise how much their numbers have declined and what important environmental indicators they can be. Anyone concerned with the conservation of old buildings or veteran trees will know how often it is a threatened bat colony that provides the stay of execution. These are immensely

important creatures and through their conservation the Heritage Lottery Fund is helping a great many people to participate in practical environmental action."

Lord Davies of Oldham, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra), is also attending the event and commented: "Madeleine Moon has done so much to raise the awareness of bats, moths and biodiversity in Parliament. Events such as this at Westminster help to raise the profile of moths and bats as a vital part of our native fauna and as indicators of the health of our natural environment. By working together we can persuade people to value the natural world around them, not only for the benefit of the species but also for our economy and society as a whole."

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.

HLF has invested more than £278 million on biodiversity projects and, to date, 11 of HLF's species-specific projects count towards Species Action Plan targets. Endangered species protected with the help of HLF grants include: basking sharks; red-barbed ants; water voles; and black grouse.

In May 2007, Sir David Attenborough launched the first of a series of initiatives in a campaign to halt the alarming decline in Britain's moth population. The campaign - Moths Count – has been made possible by an HLF grant of £806,000. Chris Baines is a former HLF Trustee and now sits on the organisation's expert Panel.

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.

The Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) 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. Count Bat, which aims to introduce new people to bat conservation, was awarded an HLF grant of £596,000 in September 2007.

Butterfly Conservation is the UK charity taking action to save butterflies, moths and their habitats. 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.

Further information

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