Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust receives grant of £247,900 from the Government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund

Thursday 29 July, 2021

- **Merlin are iconic falcons of England's moorlands and the Merlin Magic project seeks to reverse the decline of this endangered bird.**
- **90 projects awarded grants to accelerate the implementation of nature-based projects, from new 'insect pathways' in our countryside and towns, to tree planting projects in deprived urban areas**
- **Second funding round of Green Recovery Challenge Fund backed by £40 million, with over 1,000 jobs to be created or retained in England**

Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust and the Merlin Magic project has been awarded a grant from the Government's £40 million second round of the Green Recovery Challenge Fund, a multi-million pound boost for green jobs and nature recovery.

Ninety nature projects across England have been awarded grants from £68,100 to £1,950,000 to create and retain over 1,000 green jobs, backed by the Government's £80 million Green Recovery Challenge Fund.

Work will be carried out on over 600 sites from North Northumberland to the tip of Cornwall, and combined with the first round, almost a million trees will be planted, contributing towards the Government's commitment to treble tree planting rates across England by the end of this Parliament.

Our Merlin Magic project is focusing on the iconic merlin, a distinctive small falcon breeding on England's moorlands and red-listed as birds of conservation concern. Gamekeepers managing moors proudly host them and raptor workers enthusiastically search for them, but there can be disagreement over their status and perceived causes of decline.

We will help reconcile opinions through promoting cooperative working, whereby gamekeepers under licence will help find nests for raptor workers, who then validate nests and ring and tag chicks. By measuring nesting vegetation, habitat quality and avian prey, this evidence-based approach will guide dialogue amongst grouse practitioners and upland ecologists and provide a better understanding of landscape-scale improvements in priority bog and heath moorland management to benefit merlin, other ground-nesting birds, habitat condition and wildfire control. This vital funding will also help to promote public awareness of moorland conservation issues, inform conservation strategies and lay foundations for further grouse-raptor reconciliation projects. The project will contribute to all three key GRCF themes, help protect two existing jobs and create two new jobs and two trainee positions.

Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust Head of Upland Research David Baines said:

"Merlin are an often-overlooked part of the moorland bird community. This project will bring together different groups of people with a shared passion for the uplands, but with differing perspectives on how to drive their recovery. A better understanding of how merlin use upland habitats and what pressures are affecting their numbers will provide a common focus for future management."

The Green Recovery Challenge Fund is a key part of the Prime Minister's 10 Point Plan to kick-start nature recovery and tackle climate change. Connecting people with nature is another priority theme: by increasing access to nature and green spaces, projects will support both physical and mental wellbeing. The Government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund was developed by Defra and its Arm's-Length Bodies. The fund is being delivered by The National Lottery Heritage Fund in partnership with Natural England, the Environment Agency and Forestry Commission.

Environment Minister, Rebecca Pow, said:

"The diverse and ambitious projects being awarded funding today will help environmental organisations employ more people to work on tree-planting, nature restoration and crucially, help more of the public to access and enjoy the outdoors.

"Through our £80 million Fund, we are on track to support over 2,500 jobs in England, plant almost a

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million trees and increase nature recovery at a huge scale across the country, which will help us deliver against our 25 Year Environment Plan."

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

"From wetland restoration, to creating wildlife-rich habitat for bees, it is vital that we value, protect and rebuild our natural heritage. This new funding will not only allow projects to carry out direct conservation which is essential in protecting our biodiversity, but it will increase awareness of how and why we need to change our behaviours in order to protect our future."

Emma Howard Boyd, Chair of the Environment Agency, said:

"By supporting jobs from Northumberland to Somerset, the Green Recovery Challenge Fund will help deliver a nature positive future. The fund supports young people to develop skills needed to protect nature, build back greener and prepare for climate impacts, like floods and heatwaves."

Natural England Chair Tony Juniper said:

"Our environmental and conservation charity sector does an incredible job in protecting, improving and restoring the natural environment for the benefit of communities and the economy."

Forestry Commission Chair Sir William Worsley said:

"This funding will help deliver thousands more trees and help us achieve our target of trebling tree planting rates in England by the end of the Parliament. We need to work towards net zero emissions by 2050; to address biodiversity loss; to better connect people with nature; and to create more green jobs in doing so. Trees are central to this and the projects being awarded these grants will have a hugely important role in helping us realise these objectives."

A full list of awards is available to view at:

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