

Case Study

Wart-biter Species Recovery – establishing a new population of Wart-biter Bush-crickets (*Decticus verrucivorus*)

Buglife



Credit: Caleb Yule

The Vision

The Wart-biter Bush-cricket is one of our rarest insects, classified as Endangered in the UK, and is currently known from just six sites, four of which are in the Changing Chalk project area.

Increasing the number of sites it occupies is crucial to help secure the long-term survival of the species. The project aimed to establish a new population through the translocation of individuals to a new site.

Key Facts

The Wart-biter Bush-cricket is a species of high-quality chalk grassland, found on sunny slopes in areas with an appropriate grazing regime and can therefore be thought of as a flagship species for the habitat.

Despite having wings, the Wart-biter cannot fly and is therefore unable to colonise new areas of suitable habitat without assistance.



Buglife staff and volunteers ready to release Wart-biters. Credit: Rosie Hutchings

What we achieved

A potential receptor site for a new population of Wart-biters was identified early in the project which had the right mix of good quality chalk grassland, southerly aspects, and could be managed with autumn cattle grazing to maintain the appropriate structure over the long term.

Unfortunately, due to changes in staff at the receptor site and consequent issues around whether suitable grazing could be delivered, the project was delayed by two years while these issues could be resolved. However, during that time the population of Wart-biters at the donor site was monitored to ensure it continued to be robust enough to withstand the removal of individuals.

By 2025, confidence was high enough that the receptor site would be managed appropriately and the first year of the planned translocation was undertaken. Utilising volunteers trained throughout the project, thirty-two Wart-biter Bush-crickets (sixteen male and sixteen female) were collected and translocated to their new site.

Three more years of translocation will be required to fully establish a population.

How we did it

Working with an experienced, licensed Wart-biter consultant was crucial to oversee all aspects of the translocation, including the identification of a potential site, working with the receptor site staff to ensure appropriate management could be undertaken, and overseeing the translocation itself.

As an endangered species, legally protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, there were many aspects of paperwork to be undertaken. These included

- Consent from both the donor and receptor site landowners
- Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) consent for both sites
- Natural England translocation licence

The translocation was undertaken over two days, involving five people each day. This was considered to be particularly good as it had been thought four days might be required.

Key to the success of this aspect of the project was the use of trained volunteers to help with surveying and the collection of Wart-biters. They were all able to locate male Wart-biters through their song and find and identify females successfully while searching for them.

“ This year’s translocation is just the beginning. We’re optimistic that with continued support, this site will hum with Wart-biter activity for generations to come. ”

Mark Monk-Terry, Reserves Manager, Sussex Wildlife Trust



Further information

www.buglife.org.uk/bugs/bug-directory/wart-biter-bush-cricket

Lessons learnt

The project has partially achieved its aim to establish a new population of Wart-biters, but three more years of translocations to this site are required to ensure the long-term success of the project. Funding for the subsequent translocations has been secured.

The delays in starting the translocation were not within our control, and dependent upon the landowners resolving internal issues. It was considered appropriate to continue with the receptor site identified and work with the new site managers to ensure appropriate grazing could be established rather than try and identify a new site.

The recruitment and training of a committed group of volunteers (who remain closely involved in the ongoing Wart-biter project) has been key to its success. Regular surveys helped build confidence in identification and the opportunity to be involved with the translocation helped retain interest.

Specialist advice has been provided to the site managers of the new population to support appropriate habitat management for Wart-biters. Securing ongoing funding will ensure one to one advice remains available in future years.

The Changing Chalk Partnership

Led by the National Trust, Changing Chalk was a four-year partnership project from 2022 to 2026 working to reverse the ecological decline of chalk grassland in the eastern South Downs, bring histories to life, and connect local communities to the internationally significant landscape on their doorstep.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/changing-chalk-partnership



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