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2023 Project Update

Spiked Rampion

This project is part funded by
Natural England's Species Recovery
Programme





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Partners

This report has been produced as a collaboration between The Species Recovery Trust, East Sussex County Council, Kew Gardens Wakehurst, Sussex Botanical Recording Society, and Forestry England, who, along with additional volunteers, collectively make up the Spiked Rampion Steering Group, formed in 2011.

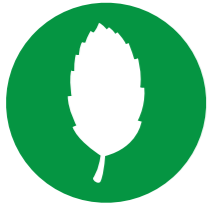
Summary



In 2023 all known sites for Spiked Rampion were monitored & the highest count to date was recorded



Further plants were introduced to the trial site at Ham Wood



Winter habitat management was conducted at the majority of sites



While exclosures remain the most effective way to protect plants, they need continual maintenance to avoid becoming choked with vegetation



Two new potential introduction sites were identified and visited

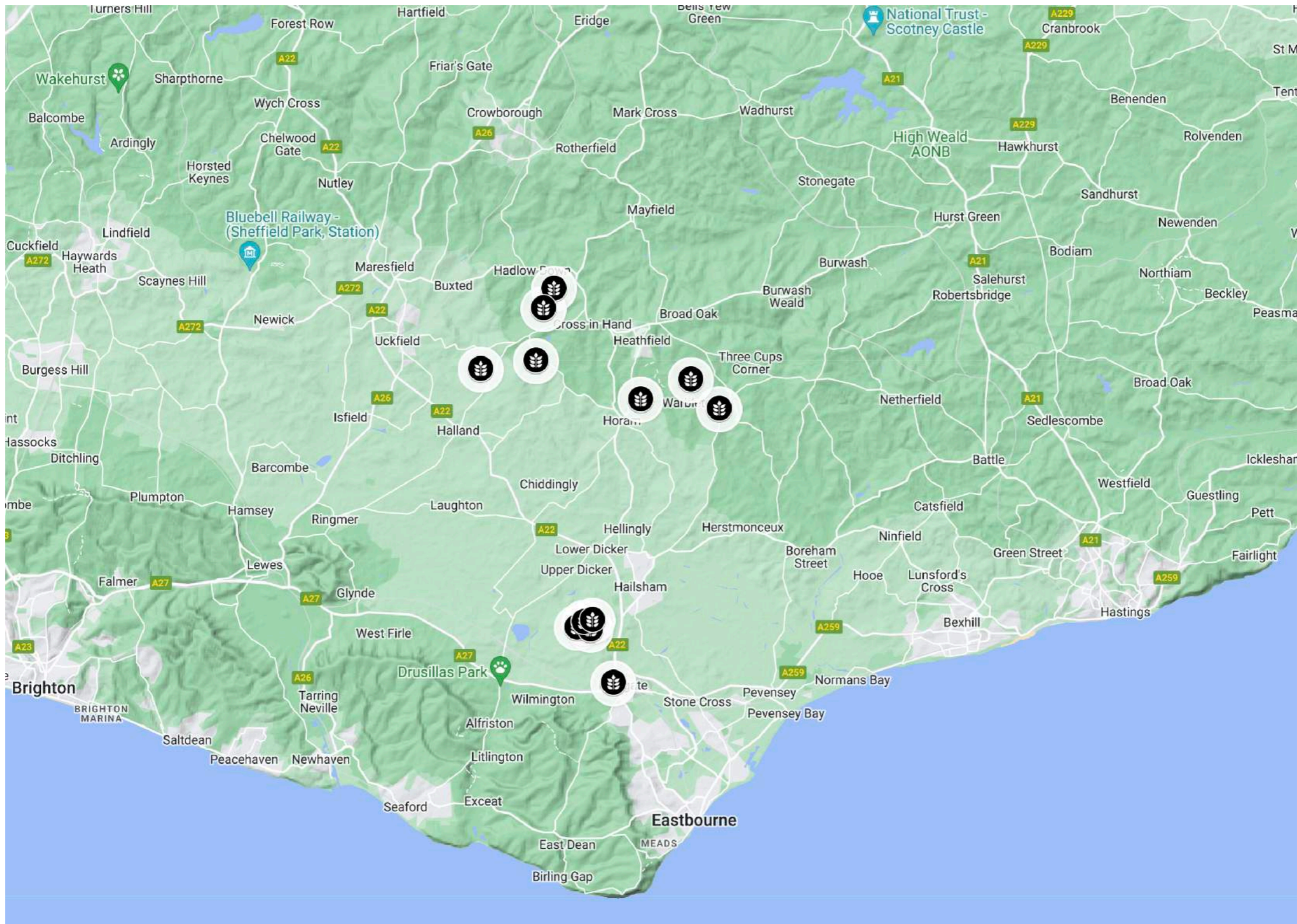


Data Summary

Plants (no. of spikes in brackets) <i>Extrapolated records in italics</i>	1995/6	2010	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Abbots Wood - Forest Walk North TQ56224 07977	23	11	8	16 (+3)	21	17	28	42 (9)	3	15(3)	Not visit	6 (1)	9 (7)	4 (2)
Abbots Wood - Lake Glade TQ5659508057										27(2)	No visit	No visit	8	8 (2)
Abbots Wood Car Park TQ55921 07427											No visit	5 (3)	9 (9)	4 (2)
Newplace Farm TQ 51093 19462	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				
Maynards Green; Bottle Shaw TQ 58525 18330	14	4	8	8	8	9 (4)	7 (6)	7	6(9)	4 (4)	8 (8)	10 (16)	18	4 (2)
Dower House Farm; Butlett's Wood TQ 53628 19919	2	6	10	14	9	17 (24)	NR	20	11	12	11 (19)	17 (12)	12 (14)	6 (10)
Dower House Intro TQ 53628 19919	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	13 (80)
Mill Wood, New Sapperton Farm TQ 57659 05223	unknow n	2 (2011)	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2(4)	No visit	10 (c20)	4	3 (4)
Riverside road verge (Tinkers Lane) TQ 53914 22374	285 (220)	148 (105)	*c. 189 (140)	c.137	135	257 (359)	188 (273)	113	269 (394)	258 (379)	306 (435)	269 (403)	179 (233)	243 (353)
Wilderness Wood (intro) TQ 53556 23856										Intro - 30	No visit	16	3	0
Brown Lane (re-intro) TQ 56107 20591										Intro - 6 clump	(31)	(44)	(33)	4 (24)
Little England Farm; Homegrove Wood TQ 54332 23276	5	1	2	4 (26)	3 (+12)	3 (+10)	19 (47.5)	14 (34)	10 (24)	7(12)	No visit	No visit	8 (9)	8 (7)
St Dunstans Farm TQ 60800 19300	4	5	5	4	3	5 (5)	4 (4)	6 (11)	10 (17)	12 (10)	38 (45)	35 (49) + intro of 3 new clumps	(63)	51 (75)
Rushlake Green TQ 62153 18007	4	22	32	36	40	49 (37)	42 (65)	42	41	41	No visit	33 (69)	33	41 (36)
Ham Wood Intro TQ 58830 19962	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14 (114)
TOTALS	339	200	256	220	230	376	308	246	349	386		401	378	403 (711)

Site locations

For interactive map click [here](#)



Trial Introductions - 2023 Update

Dower House Farm

The original population at this site is now confined to a single location, typically containing 10-20 plants (large photo). This year however, numbers were down and only 6 plants were found. The plants were generally looking poor, with single stemmed flowers. This site had previously supported another sub-site further up the track, but despite managing the woodland to allow more light in, no plants had regenerated.

In 2020 a decision was taken to bulk up the site by re-creating the second sub-site using stock grown at the Millennium Seed Bank.

In September 2022, 20 individuals were planted at three locations - 2 on either side of a ride, and 1 on a woodbank on the edge of the field. Thirteen plants survived to summer 2023, and all were prospering with a booming 80 flowering stems recorded (small photo showing the numbers of flower-heads on a single plant)!

In an attempt to reinvigorate the original population, the area was cleared of grass, leaf litter and scrub during winter 2023/24, with light scarification to aid germination. Detritus & bramble were also cleared from the introduced populations, and all were fenced for the 2024 growing season.



Ham Wood

In 2022 this site was subject to an introduction of 10 Spiked Rampion plants. In April 2023, a further 6 plants were introduced to the same location. The plants were fenced off and have been closely monitored by the landowners (steering group members). Fourteen of the 16 plants survived to the summer, with a 114 flowering stems counted.

Further seed trials are planned here for 2024/25 to further understand the mechanisms affecting germination and seedling survival.





Other Sites

Abbots Wood

Despite loss of historic sites in Abbots Wood, the woodland continues to support three sub-sites. The number of plants declined again in 2023, which is thought to have been a result of summer temperatures and low rainfall in early summer. Sixteen plants were recorded in 2023, a significant decline from 26 plants in 2022. We will monitor this site closely in the coming years.

Mill Wood, New Sapperton Farm

Only 3 plants were recorded, one less than the previous year. This population has reduced by more than half since 2021 (10 plants). A single plant remains in a cage which will be producing v little seed, if any. Consensus to leave (without extra plants introduced) to learn more about longevity and seed production.

Browns Lane (re-intro)

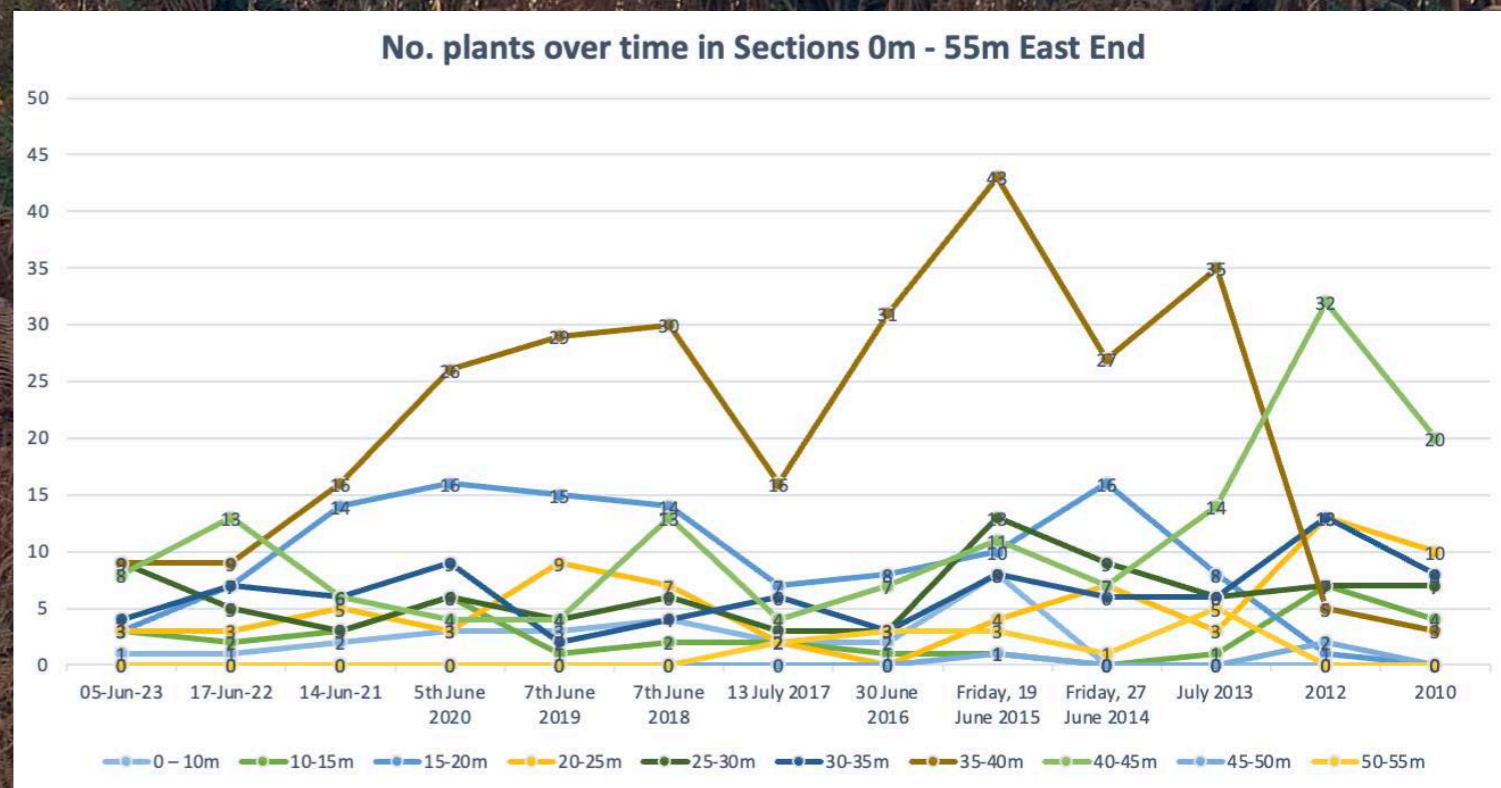
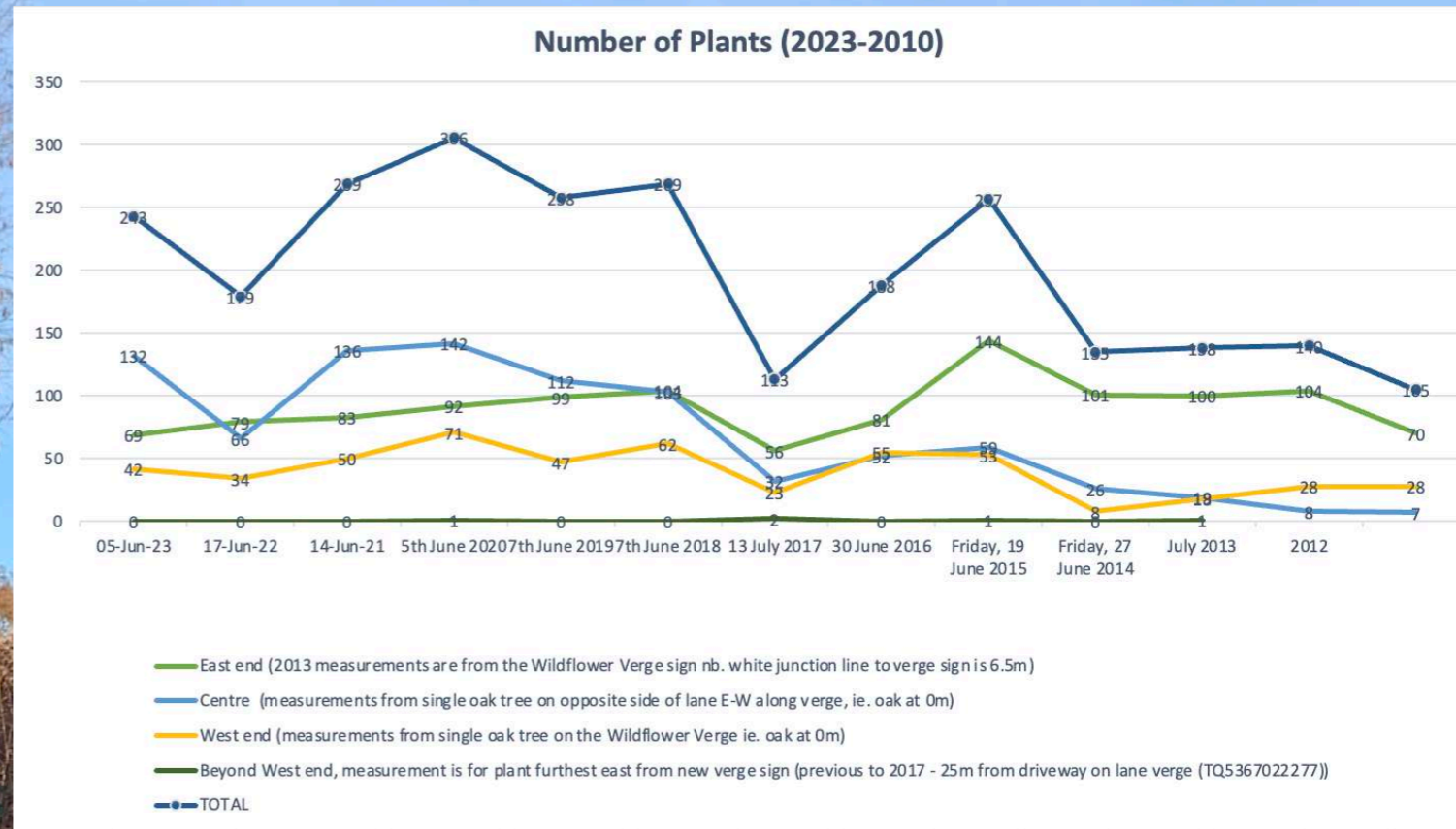
The original introduction involved planting 6 clumps of young, highly packed plants, and these appear to be faring much better than the lone mature plants used for other introductions. Since the planting in 2019, four clumps have survived on the higher ground, in an area that receives more sunlight, compared to where they have been lost. In late winter 2023, this area was cleared of vegetation, raked and additional seed scattered across the entire bank.

Riverside road verge (Tinkers Lane)

The Riverside stronghold had a come back in 2023, as we saw numbers rise to 243, after a few years of decline preceding this (graph - top right).

Since 2018, we have seen a worrying decline along the eastern section of the roadside, which supports a dense bracken layer. Discussions are being held as to whether weakening the bracken by hand should be undertaken, and this will involve a site visit in spring 2024.

Management this year has involved a winter cut and collect.



Wilderness Wood (intro)

The steering group meeting was undertaken at Wilderness Wood in summer 2023. Unfortunately no plants were refound at the site, and a unanimous decision was made to discontinue efforts here.

Little England Farm; Homegrove Wood

Two sub-sites are present within the woodland, one of which has been fenced in. The site continued to support eight plants in 2023, but with fewer flowers compared to 2022. Many of these were found just outside the enclosure, suggesting some regeneration has taken place.

Given the enclosure was completely choked in vegetation, management was undertaken in January 2024 to clear the bramble and leaf litter, and reduce over-shading.

Maynards Green; Bottle Shaw

This site has never been fenced, but benefits from low density bramble which may be keeping the plants from being grazed off. A significant decline was seen in 2023, with 4 plants and just 2 flowering spikes, down from 18 plants in 2022. This site will be closely monitored over the next few years and management carried out where appropriate.



Little England - before winter management



Little England - after winter management

St Dunstans Farm

This site has been going from strength to strength and 2023 saw the highest count within the enclosure, with 51 plants recorded. The population has responded well to the clearance work carried out in previous years.

In Dec 2023, the enclosure was cleared of bramble, bracken and other ground vegetation once again. The arisings were piled up and some light scarifying carried out.

Rushlake Green

This collection of six sub-sites has supported a good number of plants over the last ten years, and in 2023 41 plants with 36 flowering spikes were counted. One of the sub-sites failed to produce any plants, and numbers here have been consistently been 1-2 plants. Further seed trials are being conducted by the landowner within her garden.



Management at St. Dunstans Farm - before (above) and after (below)



Proposed Introductions

Highlands

This site lies on the edge of the High Weald, near Uckfield, and comprises a small area of wet woodland within a private residence. Although public access is available, this site benefits from having active management and very passionate owners. Plans to reduce canopy shading are in motion, and this will be followed by introduction of a small number of plants in autumn 2024.

Riverside (reintro)

This historic site provides really good conditions for Spiked Rampion, and is within close proximity to the stronghold population. Works are underway to reduce the canopy and scrub cover to ensure optimal conditions are created for a reintroduced population, which is intended to be planted in autumn 2024.

Plans include introducing a large number of plants (up to 45) which will provide more opportunities for seedling survival and regeneration of plants. The area will be fenced as deer pose a significant issue for this species.



Highlands



Riverside (reintro)

Ex-situ Study

A number of long-term trials continued throughout 2023, including those to test plant longevity, seed germination & seedling success.

- Ex-situ sowing of seed was conducted within a garden environment, however this was unsuccessful and there is a question mark on whether this was due to issues with seed germination or predation of young seedlings
- Ex-situ sowing of seed was conducted in nursery settings, and germination was successful and
- Conclusions: seedling survival is affected by something, likely predation by slugs
- This will be tested again in 2024/25 via trials within a wild environment - to be discussed at the 2024 steering group meeting

The longevity trial continues in ex-situ conditions, and the plants have so far lived for 5 years.



Looking forward

Next steps



Create two new sites in 2024

PROGRESS: both sites visited & plans to conduct scrub & canopy work to allow more light to the ground, introduction of plants in autumn



Seed trial in wild conditions to better understand the mechanisms affecting seedling survival



Creation of a showcase population



Continue to monitor and manage all sites, conduct the yearly steering group meeting



Riverside - further trials to weaken the bracken within a section of the roadside where numbers are falling

The Species Recovery Trust is a charity set up to tackle the loss of some of the rarest species in the UK.

There are over nine hundred native species in the UK that are classed as under threat, with several hundreds more currently widespread but known to be in significant decline. The countryside is now bereft of many species that were a familiar sight a mere generation ago.

A small number of these species are on the absolute brink of existence, poised to become extinct in our lifetimes; our goal is to stop them vanishing.

Our aim is to remove 50 species from the edge of extinction in the UK by the year 2050. In addition we are reconnecting people with wildlife and the natural world through training programmes and awareness raising.



A photograph of a forest floor. The ground is covered with a dense carpet of small purple bluebells. In the foreground, a large, moss-covered tree trunk lies horizontally across the frame. The background is filled with tall, thin trees with green foliage, suggesting a healthy woodland environment.

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