# Capital grants fund tunnels, translocations and orchids as Natural England targets species recovery



According to the Evening Standard, Natural England’s Species Recovery Programme is being used to fund a wide slate of capital projects across England as part of a targeted push to halt declines in rare and threatened species — from reintroductions and translocations to on‑the‑ground infrastructure such as crossing tunnels and habitat restoration work. The programme, which has drawn fresh attention because of schemes in regions including Cornwall and Northumberland, is explicitly framed as capital‑only investment intended to deliver tangible, long‑term conservation outputs. (Evening Standard reporting and government announcements set out the scheme’s aims and the areas receiving support.)

Natural England set out the scheme’s mechanics in a blog post published in March 2023 and government guidance reiterates the point: the Species Recovery Programme Capital Grant Scheme is a two‑year, capital‑only funding stream running across financial years 2023/24 and 2024/25. The stated objectives are to create and enhance habitat, enable conservation translocations, support applied research and install necessary infrastructure; applicants must use the Atamis portal to apply, and the programme distinguishes capital investment from revenue funding for ongoing management. Natural England’s guidance also makes clear that certain interventions — for example beaver reintroductions — are not eligible under this capital stream.

The formal government announcement in April 2023 underlined the programme’s priorities and named a range of target species, from lady’s‑slipper orchid to water vole, natterjack toad and curlew, while pointing to past recoveries (bittern and fen raft spider) as evidence that well‑directed funding can deliver measurable results. According to the government release, the scheme is designed not only to fund individual projects but to support longer‑term monitoring and the partnerships needed to sustain recovery at landscape scale.

Concrete projects funded through the scheme illustrate how the capital money has been applied on the ground. The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust has used grant support to underpin a black grouse range expansion project, moving birds from donor populations in the North Pennines to receptor sites in the North York Moors. That work has combined careful habitat assessment, licensed capture and release, and post‑release monitoring with radio‑tags to record settlement and survival — a measured approach intended to create new lekking sites where the species has not bred for generations.

Other grants have paid for engineered solutions to very practical problems. In West Berkshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust funded an Adder Connections scheme that installed purpose‑built reptile tunnels beneath a busy road, together with fencing to funnel snakes safely into the crossings. Radio‑tracking and camera monitoring were used to establish that isolated populations were not mixing and to evaluate whether the tunnels reduce road mortality — a small but potentially decisive intervention where fragmented habitat and roads threaten viability.

The scheme has also supported plant reintroductions with striking early success. In June 2025, the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust reported that lady’s‑slipper orchids at a reintroduction site in the Yorkshire Dales produced a naturally regenerating seedling — the first new wild plant at that site in almost a century. The trust credited an extended partnership effort, including propagation work at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and ongoing monitoring and habitat management, and described the discovery as proof that introduced individuals can pollinate, set seed and establish the next generation in the wild.

Invertebrate recovery has been a further strand. The Citizen Zoo‑led Hop of Hope work in Norfolk has used captive‑breeding, volunteer rearing and repeated releases to re‑establish marsh grasshopper populations on Broads sites. The project emphasises community involvement — training “Citizen Keepers” to rear and release thousands of animals — and shows how repeated, small‑scale releases combined with habitat improvement can develop self‑sustaining populations over time.

Taken together, these projects illustrate the strengths and limits of capital‑only support: it can pay for translocations, tunnels, propagation and monitoring equipment that would be hard to fund from day‑to‑day budgets, but long‑term recovery also depends on ongoing habitat management, predator control where appropriate, and sustained monitoring — activities that typically require revenue funding and continued partnership. Natural England and government communications emphasise the programme’s role in catalysing recovery, but the emerging picture from project partners is that sustained successes will depend on sequencing capital investment with long‑term stewardship and local community engagement.

### 📌 Reference Map:

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/natural-england-england-government-cornwall-northumberland-b1242672.html), [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/boost-for-rare-and-threatened-species-with-new-conservation-funding-announced)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2023/03/09/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-species-recovery-programme-capital-grant-scheme/), [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/boost-for-rare-and-threatened-species-with-new-conservation-funding-announced)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/boost-for-rare-and-threatened-species-with-new-conservation-funding-announced)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.gwct.org.uk/research/species/birds/black-grouse/range-expansion-project/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[5]](https://www.bbowt.org.uk/news/pioneer-tunnel-project-lifeline-uks-endangered-adders)
* Paragraph 6 – [[6]](https://www.ywt.org.uk/news/groundbreaking-project-successfully-returns-orchid-brink-extinction-yorkshire)
* Paragraph 7 – [[7]](https://www.citizenzoo.org/our-work/hop-of-hope/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[2]](https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2023/03/09/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-species-recovery-programme-capital-grant-scheme/), [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/boost-for-rare-and-threatened-species-with-new-conservation-funding-announced)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/natural-england-england-government-cornwall-northumberland-b1242672.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2023/03/09/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-species-recovery-programme-capital-grant-scheme/> - The Natural England blog explains the Species Recovery Programme Capital Grant Scheme, a two‑year, capital‑only funding stream running across financial years 2023/24 and 2024/25. It sets out scheme aims to create and enhance habitat, enable conservation translocations, support research and install infrastructure, and explains applicant eligibility, payment arrangements and monitoring requirements. The post describes how capital R&D differs from revenue funding, clarifies that beaver reintroductions are not eligible, and signposts Atamis applications platform and guidance. It emphasises Natural England’s role in delivering conservation action, working with partners through Memoranda of Agreement and grants to reverse declines in nationally threatened species.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/boost-for-rare-and-threatened-species-with-new-conservation-funding-announced> - The GOV.UK press release announces a multi‑million pound grant scheme launched by Natural England to safeguard rare and threatened species. Published 3 April 2023, it outlines objectives to create and restore habitat, support conservation translocations and research, and names target species such as lady’s‑slipper orchid, water vole, natterjack toad and curlew. The release highlights the Species Recovery Programme’s history and gives examples of past successes like bittern and fen raft spider recoveries. It sets out who can apply and the Atamis application route, framing the scheme as part of government commitments to halt species decline and support long‑term monitoring programmes.
4. <https://www.gwct.org.uk/research/species/birds/black-grouse/range-expansion-project/> - The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust’s Black Grouse Range Expansion Project page describes efforts to translocate black grouse from the North Pennines to the North York Moors to expand range. Funded by Natural England’s Species Recovery Programme Capital Grant Scheme, the project explains habitat assessments, donor population selection, licensed capture and release and monitoring with radio‑tags to record settlement and survival. The page outlines the rationale for range expansion, the importance of connected habitat and predator management, and how the work aims to establish lekking sites where birds have not bred for generations. It links to project updates and outputs.
5. <https://www.bbowt.org.uk/news/pioneer-tunnel-project-lifeline-uks-endangered-adders> - BBOWT’s news page describes the pioneering Adder Connections project at Greenham and Crookham Commons in West Berkshire. Funded by Natural England’s Species Recovery Programme, the scheme installed two purpose‑built snake tunnels beneath Old Thornford Road to connect isolated adder populations and reduce road mortality. The article explains how radio‑tracking revealed populations were not mixing, prompting 100‑metre reptile fencing to funnel snakes into 0.5m by 0.5m tunnels with gravel floors and open grilles to admit sunlight. It outlines monitoring plans using cameras and further radio surveys, the project’s conservation rationale, and how lessons may inform similar interventions elsewhere across the country.
6. <https://www.ywt.org.uk/news/groundbreaking-project-successfully-returns-orchid-brink-extinction-yorkshire> - Yorkshire Wildlife Trust reports a major conservation milestone: lady’s‑slipper orchids have produced a naturally regenerating seedling at a reintroduction site in the Yorkshire Dales. The piece explains decades‑long efforts involving propagation at Kew, volunteer nurture, habitat protection and targeted planting at former sites supported by Natural England’s Species Recovery Programme. It describes the discovery in June 2025 as the first new wild plant in nearly a century, signalling that introduced individuals have successfully pollinated, set seed and germinated. The article credits partners including RBG Kew, Plantlife, the National Trust and BSBI, and stresses ongoing monitoring and hopes for future expansion.
7. <https://www.citizenzoo.org/our-work/hop-of-hope/> - Citizen Zoo’s Hop of Hope page describes their large marsh grasshopper conservation work in Norfolk, detailing captive‑breeding and repeated releases since 2019 to restore populations to the Broads. The charity explains how volunteers – ‘Citizen Keepers’ – rear and release thousands of grasshoppers across multiple sites, with monitoring demonstrating natural breeding and the development of self‑sustaining populations at receptor locations. The project highlights community engagement, volunteer training, and habitat management to improve grassland conditions necessary for the species. It sets out results, release figures, and invitations for public involvement, emphasising the collaborative, long‑term approach required for invertebrate recovery in England.