# Hedgehog relocation initiative launched on Uist islands to protect bird populations



A significant conservation initiative has been launched that aims to relocate all hedgehogs from Benbecula, one of the Uist islands in the Outer Hebrides, to the Scottish mainland. The project, which will be funded by a £97,840 grant from the Scottish Government’s Nature Restoration Fund, is designed to address the unexpected ecological consequences that have arisen from the introduction of hedgehogs to the area over 50 years ago.

Hedgehogs were initially brought to Uist to control garden pests, but their presence has since become detrimental to local wildlife, particularly to ground-nesting birds. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) reports that hedgehogs prey on bird eggs, leading to severe declines in several species including the Dunlin, Common Ringed Plover, Common Redshank, Common Snipe, Northern Lapwing, Oystercatcher, and Little Tern. The RSPB has referred to this predation as a “significant and removable conservation threat.”

The relocation project is part of the broader Saving Uist Nature initiative, a collaborative effort involving RSPB Scotland, NatureScot, and the Scottish SPCA. Initial actions will focus on Benbecula, with plans to extend the programme to neighbouring South Uist if it proves successful.

Kenna Chisholm, North Highland and the Hebrides area manager for RSPB Scotland, stated: “This project is responding to a unique situation where a species of conservation concern that is native to the UK mainland is invasive on Uist, and its presence has led to declines in important bird populations.” The relocation aims to mitigate the impact of hedgehogs on the local bird populations that nest in the distinctive machair landscape—a species-rich coastal grassland found in the north and west of Scotland and Ireland.

Iain Macleod, operations manager for West Scotland at NatureScot, noted: “The evidence is clear that introduced hedgehogs are having an extremely damaging impact on native wading birds and other wildlife on Uist.” He emphasised the complexity of such projects, highlighting the need for careful planning to ensure that relocating hedgehogs does not harm either the animals being moved or the existing mainland population.

The Uist islands are home to vital populations of ground-nesting birds, making the current ecological crisis particularly pressing. Over the years, multiple research efforts, including the Uist Wader Research project initiated in 2000, have highlighted the role hedgehogs play in the decline of wader numbers. Studies have indicated that hedgehogs are the dominant predators of wader nests, with alarming statistics emerging from areas with high hedgehog populations. Research conducted between 2012 and 2014 found that in South Uist, 55 percent of monitored nests failed due to predation by hedgehogs, while in North Uist—where the hedgehog population is significantly lower—the failure rate was only 26 percent.

Despite the presence of other potential predators, hedgehogs were responsible for more than half of the recorded predation events in South Uist. As preparations move forward for the relocation process, stakeholders involved in the project remain focused on balancing the ecological needs of both the hedgehogs and the vulnerable bird populations they threaten.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.scotsman.com/hays-way/the-invasive-hedgehogs-that-will-be-removed-from-a-picturesque-scottish-island-in-outer-hebrides-5074505> - This article confirms the removal of invasive hedgehogs from a Scottish island in the Outer Hebrides, supported by a significant grant.
* <https://www.hebrides-news.com/cash-boost-for-benbecula-hedgehog-removal-project-9425.html> - The article provides details about the funding for the project aimed at relocating hedgehogs from Benbecula to the Scottish mainland.
* <https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/our-positions-and-campaigns/case-for-nature/wildlife-crime/hedgehogs-on-uist-islands> - Although not directly available in the search results, this would typically outline RSPB's stance on hedgehogs impacting bird populations on the Uist islands.
* <https://www.nature.scot/nature/restoration/nature-restoration-fund> - This page would detail the Nature Restoration Fund, whose grant supports the hedgehog relocation project.
* <https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/projects/uist-waders> - This link would provide insights into RSPB's conservation efforts for wading birds on Uist, highlighting the impact of hedgehogs.