

PRESS RELEASE**15/07/2022****A Hop of Hope - Large Marsh Grasshopper Reintroduction Project**

Going into its fourth year of releases, the Hop of Hope project, run by Citizen Zoo in collaboration with Natural England, Norfolk Wildlife Trust, The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire, and Wild Ken Hill, will be releasing Large Marsh Grasshoppers (LMGs) onto various sites across Norfolk on Sunday the 17th of July. This will be the first of two releases this summer, the second being on Sunday the 21st of August.

We are so excited to have Tony Juniper, Chair of Natural England, along at our release date on Sunday 17th of July. On the day, Tony will meet with the core Hop of Hope team to learn more about the project and meet some of our dedicated and passionate volunteers.

Background

While the Large Marsh Grasshopper is the biggest and most handsome of all British grasshoppers, it is also one of the rarest. The degradation and loss of their preferred habitat - fens and peat bogs - has constricted their range considerably. Until 2018, it survived almost exclusively in the valley mires and wet heaths of the New Forest and Dorset. However, its former distribution included wetland habitats across Norfolk and the Cambridgeshire fens.



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An adult Large Marsh Grasshopper reared by one of our Citizen Keepers © Keith Redhead

Citizen Zoo launched the project to restore the species throughout its former geographical range utilising an innovative home-rearing methodology. In 2018, with consent from Natural England and the Forestry Commission, we safely collected a limited number of wild LMGs at several sites in the New Forest. Half were introduced directly at a wetland site in Norfolk. We brought the rest into captivity and allowed them to breed in carefully controlled conditions. Here they laid far more eggs than they would have done in the wild. These eggs were collected for hatching and home-rearing the following summer.



Freshly emerged Large Marsh Grasshoppers hand reared by our Citizen Keepers © Amy Stocking

This is where our amazing volunteers, or 'Citizen Keepers', come in. For 8 weeks each summer, they collect fresh grass daily, to feed hungry and growing young grasshoppers maintained in a home vivarium. A far higher proportion of grasshoppers are reared to adulthood in this way, in captivity, than would survive from hatching in the wild. Using this method, so far, we have successfully released over 3200 individuals at four wetland sites

across Norfolk. Perhaps even more excitingly, we have seen released individuals mating, and they have certainly laid eggs and completed their life cycle in the wild. Fieldwork suggests that our main site produced a population of 400-500 wild-born adult grasshoppers last summer.



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Left: Adult Large Marsh Grasshopper in a home vivarium © Keith Redhead. Right: Two of our Citizen Keepers releasing their home reared hoppers in 2021 © Citizen Zoo

Quotes:

Lucas Ruzo, CEO, Citizen Zoo:

“We are so excited to be going into the fourth year of the project – with over 3200 individuals now back into four sites across Norfolk, we are confident of the long-term survival of the species throughout its previous geographical range in Norfolk. Our Lead Entomologist, Dr Stuart Green, works tirelessly from Spring to Autumn each year to ensure we have sufficient eggs to hatch and grow on, meaning we are in a great position for this year’s releases. With 13 Citizen Keepers this year, around a 50:50 split between new and returning Keepers, we have a good chance of increasing on the number of hoppers we rear and successfully release back into the wild. Last year was our first release at Wild Ken Hill and we are so happy to be going back there in 2022 and hope to expand to new sites in 2023.”

Pamela Abbott, Chair, Citizen Zoo:

“It has been an incredible journey that started with a wild walk on a newly restored wetland listening to a site manager’s ambition for restoring lost species and culminated in seeing the first native-born Large Marsh Grasshoppers in Norfolk in over 50 years. Being alongside our Citizen Keepers as they nurture their batches of egg pods through the first hatching to releasing their fully grown magnificent grasshoppers on site has been an absolute delight.”

Tony Juniper, Chair at Natural England:

“The return of the Large Marsh Grasshopper to East Anglia is one among many examples of the practical actions that can be taken to recover our depleted wildlife. It’s a real privilege to be a part of this important release on one of Natural England’s National Nature Reserves.

It is wonderful to be able to see the project first hand and watch the grasshoppers released by the volunteer Citizen Keepers, who have put so much time and effort into raising them.

This is a great example of Nature Recovery in action through a carefully planned reintroduction. By working together and involving volunteers we can support the Large Marsh Grasshopper to thrive once again in East Anglia.”

Caroline Zakrzewski, Citizen Keeper:

“It’s been brilliant seeing them emerge and grow. Getting to see them up close on a daily basis has given us a unique appreciation of their life cycle and the importance of preserving both them and their habitat.”

Ciara Stafford, Citizen Keeper:

“I joined the Hop of Hope project to help bring back a lost species, and because I loved the idea that a small group of people could come together to do something that has a wonderful, long-lasting legacy for Norfolk’s wild places.

Seeing the grasshoppers hatch was a special moment, it was very exciting to have such a rare species in my living room! They’re so full of character and it’s been fascinating to watch them grow into bright, colourful adults. I’m looking forward to doing it all over again with the next batch.”

Extra Information

Project Webpage: <https://www.citizenzoo.org/our-work/hop-of-hope/>

Media enquiries and more Information: hello@citizenzoo.org

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