

Co-operative Lifeline for Red Squirrels in Perthshire

Endangered and protected species, including red squirrels in Perthshire, are being offered a lifeline by Britain's largest farmer, The Co-operative Group.

The company has set up a team of "Habitat Heroes" on six of its farms across the country, to help preserve some of the UK's most iconic species, including water voles, otters, bats and red squirrels.

By launching the national wildlife initiative, the group's farming business joins leading environmental campaigners who are taking direct action to help preserve species under threat, in response to the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and continuing concerns over a global decline in biodiversity.

The Habitat Heroes project aims to identify where The Co-operative Farms can make investments and adaptations on the six farms to improve the habitats, feeding and breeding opportunities for endangered or protected species, helping to safeguard them for the future.

The Co-operative Group is funding the project, while its farming business has harnessed the support of farm managers, local environmental groups and volunteers to carry out the vital environmental work to improve and sustain the habitats of species that are indigenous to the farms.

Christine Tacon, managing director of The Co-operative Farms, said: "As Britain's largest farmer we feel we have a responsibility to lead the way environmentally. The Habitat Heroes project gives us the chance to look at ways we can really make our land work for local wildlife."

She added: "The beauty of this scheme is that we can keep on revisiting and revising it. As part of the scheme, we will conduct regular surveys into the wildlife on our land to find out what is working and where we are seeing positive results, to help guide the environmental work we commit to in the future."

At Blairgowrie in Perthshire, The Co-operative Farms is working with local environment group Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels to monitor the population of red squirrels in the area. "Reds-only" feeding boxes have been put up to supplement their diet.

The other farms taking part in the Habitat Heroes project are Goole in Yorkshire,

Coldham in Cambridgeshire, Tillington in Herefordshire, Down Ampney in Gloucestershire and Stoughton in Leicestershire.

Several of the sites have webcams to study the targeted species.

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