

NEWS RELEASE

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Digging for wildlife at Penhale Dunes

- Excavation works will be taking place at selected sand dunes at Penhale Dunes to improve habitats for rare wildlife
- Penhale Dunes is home to many species, including the silver-studded blue butterfly, skylarks and protected plants such as petalwort
- It is estimated that around 50% of Penhale Dunes was comprised of bare sand habitat in the 1940s; this has now reduced to less than 2%. The works will restore some of this habitat for wildlife

Innovative excavation works are beginning next week at Penhale Dunes near Perranporth.

Cornwall Wildlife Trust have announced that the works beginning on Monday August 21st will involve using earth-moving machinery to create 'V-shaped notches' in the sand dunes, as part of a project to help restore natural dynamic processes and support the area's wildlife.

Penhale is one of the largest dune systems in Cornwall, spanning 620 hectares (1,532 acres). With sand dunes listed as the habitat most at risk in Europe for biodiversity loss, it's an incredibly important area to protect for nature. These works will rejuvenate this area of mobile dunes, helping the many species which make use of open areas of bare sand.

Jon Cripps, Penhale Dunes Ranger at Cornwall Wildlife Trust said:

"The work will look quite dramatic as it's unusual to see big diggers on the dunes, shifting loads of sand. However, this short-term disruption should create long-term benefits for lots of dune-adapted wildlife.

"We'll create open spaces for plants like sea holly and sea rocket to colonise and lots of warm sandy niches for the various insects that burrow into sand, such as the tiny silvery leaf-cutter bee, the minotaur dung beetle and the predatory bee-wolf wasp! We hope the scale of the work will allow the wind to whistle through the dunes and keep these areas mobile, dynamic and diverse for many years to come."

The sand dunes at Penhale are both nationally and internationally important for their diverse range of coastal habitats and are one of the largest sand dune systems in southwest England. The area is designated nationally as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and internationally as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). They are home to a wide variety of wildlife, such as the much-loved silver-studded blue butterfly, scrambled egg lichen, skylarks, adders and protected plants such as petalwort, early gentian and shore dock.

Sand dunes need to be free to move to support their resident wildlife and provide them with safe homes. Areas of naturally shifting mobile sand are essential to them being healthy and diverse ecosystems. Many burrowing insects require bare sand as part of their life cycle.

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Sadly, many sand dunes have become too stable and overgrown with dense vegetation. Sand dunes are now one of the most threatened habitat types for biodiversity loss in Europe. The percentage of precious bare and mobile sand at Penhale Dunes has dramatically reduced over recent decades. It is estimated that around 50% of Penhale Dunes comprised bare sand habitats in the 1940s; this has now reduced to less than 2%.

A variety of reasons have led to this change, including a lack of large grazing animals eating dune plants and air pollution creating higher levels of nitrogen deposition which increases soil fertility, leading to increased plant growth and the spread of invasive plants.

The restoration works taking place at Penhale Dunes form part of Dynamic Dunescapes, a collaborative project working to restore 7,000 hectares (17,297 acres) of sand dunes across England and Wales. The works involve funneling wind-blown sand from the beach into the dune system behind. V-shaped notches will be created by diggers, and the area around these will also be stripped of turf, to create more bare sand habitat and to encourage these dunes to be more mobile again. Although these works may appear destructive, they are being done for the purposes of habitat restoration.

'Notches' have been successfully created in other parts of the UK as part of the Dynamic Dunescapes project, including at Formby and Ainsdale, on the Sefton Coast. This will be the first time the technique has been used in Cornwall.

During the works, access to the coast path, which runs along the beach at this point, will be unaffected. However, there may be slight delays on the permissive route along the dune ridge, as machinery crosses. For safety reasons Cornwall Wildlife Trust and landowners the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) ask people to please keep away from machinery at all times.

This area of Penhale Dunes is used as a military training area, so any land except the permissive path is off limits to the public. However, Cornwall Wildlife Trust have been working here in partnership with the Ministry of Defence's DIO for over 15 years, balancing military needs with ecological conservation work.

Lt Col Andy Westcott (Retd), Training Safety Officer for Cornwall Defence Infrastructure Organisation said:

"We are extremely proud to be working with Cornwall Wildlife Trust on the Dynamic Dunescapes project. As custodians of this fantastic dune system, it's great to see this management work happening to improve its condition and suitability for sand-loving wildlife."

Dynamic Dunescapes is a partnership project funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund and EU LIFE programme. Project partners are Natural England, Plantlife, Natural Resources Wales, National Trust and The Wildlife Trusts.

Find out more about Dynamic Dunescapes

<https://www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/dynamicdunescapes>

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Images:

- Adders and other reptiles bask in open, sunny areas of sand, credit Danny Green, 2020Vision
- Example Dynamic Dunes excavation works at Formby, credit National Trust Formby (2)
- Example Dynamic Dunes excavation works at Formby, credit National Trust Formby
- Marram grass is one species that copes particularly well in areas of moving sand, credit Cornwall Wildlife Trust
- Penhale Long Exposure Landscape, credit Ben Watkins
- The area of Penhale Dunes where notching work is happening, credit Cornwall Wildlife Trust
- The silver-studded blue butterfly is one species doing well at Penhale Dunes, credit Adam Poledníček
- Tiny silvery leaf-cutter bees and other insects make nest burrows in areas of bare sand, credit Sally Luker



Editor's notes

About Cornwall Wildlife Trust:

Cornwall Wildlife Trust has been protecting Cornwall's wildlife, on land and at sea, since 1962. It is Cornwall's leading local wildlife conservation charity, with over 17,000 members and 1,000 volunteers. The charity manages 59 nature reserves across Cornwall, including a range of habitats such as woodlands, meadows, wetlands and heaths. It also runs a number of marine and terrestrial based conservation projects in partnership with others, including Upstream Thinking and [Penwith Landscape Partnership](#), and hosts the [Environmental Records Centre for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly \(ERCCIS\)](#).

The Trust is one of 46 in the UK. Together, they make up the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts.

Visit www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk and follow [@cwallwildlife](#) on Twitter or Cornwall Wildlife Trust on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#) to keep up-to-date with Trust's projects, events and news.

About Dynamic Dunescapes:

Dynamic Dunescapes is a partnership project restoring sand dunes across England and Wales for the benefit of wildlife, people and communities, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the EU LIFE Programme.

Project partners are Natural England, Plantlife, National Trust, Natural Resources Wales, Cornwall Wildlife Trust, Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust and Cumbria Wildlife Trust. The coastal dunes of England and Wales are internationally important habitats for wildlife, listed as one of the most threatened environments in Europe for biodiversity loss. These dunes are a sanctuary to rare species like the fen orchid, natterjack toad and sand lizard. But, dune management supporting dune stabilisation over many decades has meant that dunes have become overgrown with vegetation. We now realise that this is putting protected wildlife at risk.

Healthy sand dunes need to be free to move and be dynamic. Many species need areas of open sand to thrive, so this project will bring life back to the dunes by creating areas of open sand. Other specialised creatures need us to improve the dune slacks, as these often water-filled dips behind the dunes are important habitats for amphibians and birds. Invasive species will also be removed from the dunes and dune grasslands, to improve conditions for rare native plants to flourish. We will work with skilled local and national experts, and involve schools and local groups, volunteers and visitors of all ages and abilities to help rejuvenate our dunes. Follow [@dynamicdunes](#) on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

Cornwall Wildlife Trust is the lead partner for the project at The Towans and Penhale Dunes, where a wide variety of work has already been happening for the last three years.



About Penhale Dunes:

Penhale Dunes is not owned by Cornwall Wildlife Trust, but it's a site where the Trust work in partnership with other landowners, including.

- Perran Sands Holiday Park (management of Gear Sands)
- Ministry of Defence. The military training area is used for a variety of training activities and its boundaries are marked by red and white posts. There are no public footpaths through the site, but the South West Coast Path runs alongside the Western boundary.
- Perranzabuloe Parish Council (land near Perranporth Beach)
- Perranporth golf club
- St Piran's Trust which owns scheduled ancient monuments (St Pirans Oratory and Church).

