



Plantlife press release

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01 WEDNESDAY 15 MARCH

Spokespeople available for comment

Britain's rare rainforests re-energised by Plantlife and partners' conservation work

- **Wood wise web: citizen science volunteers rediscover 15 fragments of lost rainforest, report 60 new species records**
- **Life after death: rare and threatened lichens saved from dying trees through emergency translocation operations**
- **Project boosts public engagement with wonderful wet and wild woodlands**
- **Britain's temperate rainforests are just as special and spectacular as their tropical cousins but are actually even rarer**
- **From Tumbling Kittens to String-of-sausages lichen names are AMAZING!**



Photo credit: Dave Lamacraft / Plantlife

Britain's rainforests, one of our rarest and wildest woodland habitats, have been offered a much-needed lifeline thanks to the release of groundbreaking expert management guidance (1) by Plantlife.

The guidelines, the first interactive, online version to be produced by Plantlife to outline how best to look after these temperate woodlands for the benefit of lichens, ferns and bryophytes (mosses and liverworts) are decades in the making and an output of pioneering conservation work undertaken by the Building Resilience in South West Woodlands conservation partnership project backed by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (2).

We will never know how big Britain's temperate rainforests – lush and humid woodlands where plants grow on other plants - once was, but the remnants are likely to be a fraction of its former area.

The historic decline of rainforests puts some species at risk of extinction as this habitat is their only known home. Indeed, some species are *only* able to survive in rainforest conditions and internationally important populations of lichens, ferns and bryophytes adorn Britain's rainforests. In Britain the horsehair lichen *Bryoria smithii* is only known from two rainforest sites in Devon where its entire population would fit comfortably on two sheets of A4 paper and *Arthonia thoriana*, an achingly rare comma lichen, is not known from anywhere else in the world other than at Horner Wood in Somerset.

Focusing conservation efforts on what rainforest remains is crucial. Practical conservation on the ground has safeguarded five especially vulnerable rainforest sites across Somerset and Devon by clearing invasive species, letting more light in through the canopy and creating a future generation of veteran trees. In total, 73 hectares of temperate rainforest have been directly managed under the project with a further 162 hectares coming under better management as a result of training land managers across the region. Regionally threatened lichens - including the spectacular and rare Tree Lungwort (*Lobaria pulmonaria*) that resembles human lungs - have been successfully translocated from ash trees threatened by Ash Dieback to nearby Hazel, Oak, and Sycamore trees.

The beneficial impact is not limited to protecting existing rainforests: working alongside Plantlife experts, a team of trained volunteers have surveyed nearly 300 woodlands across the region using Plantlife's Rapid Rainforest Assessment, improving our understanding on their condition to help inform future management (3). They have also discovered 15 high quality rainforest locations by finding new records of rainforest indicator species records such as the oceanic liverworts Greater Whipwort (*Bazzania trilobata*) and Prickly Featherwort (*Plagiochila spinulosa*). Over 60 new species records at sites across the counties have been recorded. Lichens living in rainforests in the South West of England include the delightfully named String-of-sausages (*Usnea articulata*), Flourey Dog Lichen (*Peltigera collina*), Tattered Jelly-skin (*Scytinium lichenoides*), Mealy-rimmed Shingle Lichen (*Pannaria conoplea*), and Tumbling Kittens (*Hypotrachyna taylorensis*).

Rachel Jones, Building Resilience Project Manager, said:

“Once celebrated by William Wordsworth and J.R.R. Tolkien, Britain’s rainforests have become smaller, more fragmented and isolated from each other over centuries due to inappropriate grazing, clearance and conversion. But we are turning the tide. The discovery of these lost ‘relic’ sites and new species records, alongside development of fresh guidance that will support others to improve the condition of rainforests, paves the way towards a great British rainforest revival.”

Plantlife has partnered with the National Trust, Exmoor National Park, Dartmoor National Park, the Quantock Hills AONB, Cornwall AONB, Tamar Valley AONB, Devon Biodiversity Records Centre, British Lichen Society, British Bryological Society, Woodland Trust, South West Lakes Trusts and Natural England on the pioneering project.

Dave Lamacraft, Lichen and Bryophyte Specialist, Plantlife, said:

“Britain’s remaining remnants of rainforests face severe and surging threats from a lack of appropriate management, invasive species, tree diseases, climate change and air pollution. But through this project we now understand better how to build their resilience. To safeguard these biodiversity hotspots we have undertaken some emergency management to secure the futures of some really rare species, including the successful transplanting of Lobarion community lichens from stricken or fallen ash trees to recipient trees. Breathing new life into these magical ‘lungs of the forest’ lichens and learning about how best to manage this amazing habitat has been a really rewarding experience.”

It is not only rainforests’ resilience that has been built. Under the project Plantlife has run guided forest bathing sessions that have demonstrated the wellbeing benefits to people of spending contemplative, mindful time in woodlands.

Dr Alison Smith, Lead Community Scientist, Building Resilience, commented:

“Britain’s temperate rainforests are just as special and spectacular as their tropical cousins but are actually even rarer (4). Building Resilience has played a key role in raising the profile of temperate rainforests but they still need better recognition and protection if they are not to quietly vanish from the landscape. Connecting people with nature is crucial – we have trained hundreds of people to be able to identify lichens, bryophyte and ferns. Once people are able to view these amazing organisms close-up and notice their diversity and importance they find woodland walks are never the same again and are moved to care more deeply about these special places.”

Through the project 262 events have been delivered, directly engaging 2,946 adults and over 800 children (5). Recent polling undertaken by the Lost Rainforests of Britain campaign spearheaded by

Guy Shrubsole demonstrates (6) huge public appetite for action: 93% of the British public support protecting the country's rainforest, while 85% back its expansion and 80% think public funding should support its restoration.

Ends

To arrange interviews please contact Archie.Thomas@plantlife.org.uk

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<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/rnuac7s8aww84ca/AACRCgwLRESMQxSfHtrZkvsra?dl=0>

Notes to editors:

1. <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/protecting-plants-fungi/temperate-rainforest/>
2. <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/case-studies/building-resilience-in-south-west-woodlands/>
3. Over 200 volunteers, woodland owners and land managers were trained to carry out Rapid Rainforest Assessments. In total over 300 surveys were completed at 281 different woodlands.
4. Tropical rainforest covers about 6% of the worlds surface, temperate rainforest less than 1%.
5. Resources for families and educators: <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/discover-wild-plants-nature/habitats/temperate-rainforest/temperate-rainforest-learning-resources>
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/oct/21/exclusive-lost-rainforest-could-be-revived-across-20-of-great-britain>