

# Extinct plant reintroduced to the wild in Wales after 62 years

Spokespeople including Robbie Blackhall-Miles available for comment

- Future rosier for mountain beauty Rosy Saxifrage, and other wild plants facing extinction.
- Extreme botanists will locate cliff edges appropriate for reintroductions

**A beautiful mountain plant that once clung to cliff edges in Eryri (Snowdonia) has been successfully reintroduced in to the wild in Wales after being extinct since 1962.**

This trial reintroduction of Rosy saxifrage (*Saxifraga rosacea*), decades in the planning, is a triumph for Plantlife botanists and their partners – Natural Resources Wales and National Trust - working to save species teetering on the edge of extinction in Wales (1).

The diminutive beauty from the saxifrage (*Saxifragaceae*) family has been maintained in cultivation and it is plants with direct lineage to the 1962 specimens that have been put back in the wild.

The successful trial outplanting has been undertaken on land cared for by the National Trust, and in coming months surveys for appropriate habitats will be conducted by abseiling botanists. These surveys aim to find where it will be best to reintroduce the species fully to the wild. Locations will be selected close to where populations are thought to have previously been recorded.

Rosy saxifrage is thought to have slipped into extinction in Wales primarily due to overcollection by plant enthusiasts, particularly in the Victorian era. The wild plant isn't a great competitor with stronger growing plant species so the nutrient enrichment of its favoured mountain habitat because of atmospheric air pollution is also considered to have played a part in its demise (2).

Rosy saxifrage now flowers at a location close to where it was last recorded in the wild and plans are afoot to boost numbers now the first outplanting has taken place. The species was first recorded in Wales in 1796 by J.W.Griffith (Clark, 1900) and there are up to five records from the 19th century. In the 20th century, there are three records, all in Eryri.

The successful reintroduction has been spearheaded by Plantlife botanist Robbie Blackhall-Miles, Project Officer for the Tlysau Mynydd Eryri (Mountain Jewels of Eryri) (3) conservation partnership project that aims to secure the futures of some of our rarest alpine plants and invertebrates in Wales.

**Robbie Blackhall-Miles commented:**

*“Successfully returning a lost species to the wild marks a special moment for nature recovery. Rosy saxifrage’s sad demise was driven chiefly by plant collectors’ greed, so this project represents returning stolen jewels to their rightful place in the Welsh landscape. Each and every native wild plant contributes to the diversity and health of ecosystems and putting Rosy saxifrage back where it belongs restores a lost balance.*

*“Rosy saxifrage and a fleet of other Arctic-alpine wild plants are particularly challenged by climate change driven by human activity so it incumbent on us to care better for mountain habitats like Eryri.”*

**John Clark, Natur am Byth Programme Manager, commented:**

*“Reintroductions such as this are core to the ambitious Natur am Byth programme, bringing species back from the edge of survival in Wales. Our partnership is broad and wide reaching, empowering species specialists, landowners and local communities to restore the diversity of life on their doorsteps.”*

**Rhys Wheldon-Roberts, Cwm Idwal Partnership Officer at the National Trust said:**

*“Arctic Alpines are such an important part of Cwm Idwal’s natural heritage and why it’s such a special place.*

*“Cwm Idwal was designated as Wales’ first NNR because of its unique geology and the plants found here, which is why this project is really exciting and hopeful. It’s a tangible sign of the differences we can make to nature by working together, and shows nature recovery in action in the face of the biodiversity crisis by bringing extinct species back to their native habitat.*

*“This reintroduction aligns with the Trust’s nature renewal ambitions as well as improving the condition of existing habitats. To have a healthy functioning ecosystem you need to have all the native species present and healthy.”*

Under the Mountain Jewels of Eryri project, conservationists are also working to bolster populations of a plant species that is down to just seven plants left in the wild in Wales and a plant that has just four known individuals in the wild in the world (4).

**Ends**

For more information or to arrange an interview please

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**Notes to editors:**

1. Tlysau Mynydd Eryri (Mountain Jewels of Eryri) forms a part of the wider Natur am Byth! partnership, Wales’ flagship Green Recovery project that is led by Natural Resources Wales.

The National Trust are a key local delivery partner for Mountain Jewels of Eryri, and this undertaking represents part of their commitment to deliver climate resilience for Wales' natural heritage.

2. Air pollution poses a huge, and under-reported, threat to wild plants, fungi and lichens <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/our-work/clean-air-wild-plants-fungi/#:~:text=Transport%2C%20power%20stations%2C%20industry%2C,wild%20plants%2C%20lichens%20and%20fungi>.
3. Tlysau Mynydd Eryri is one of the project areas of the Natur am Byth! partnership. Led by Natural Resources Wales, the Wales wide programme is composed of multiple projects that are headed by each of the ten core partner organisations. The species recovery work focuses on 67 target species, of which 42 are at risk of extinction in Wales. The aim of this partnership is to deliver the country's largest natural heritage and outreach programme to save species from extinction and reconnect people to nature. The Natur am Byth programme wouldn't be possible without the support of players of the National Lottery after successfully receiving a £4.1million delivery phase grant from the Heritage Fund in summer 2023. The programme has also received essential cash support from Welsh Government, the Landfill Disposal Tax Community Scheme (LDTCS) administered by Wales Council for Voluntary Action, Natural Resources Wales, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the Arts Council of Wales, Banister Trust, Animal Friends Insurance and other generous donors.
4. Tlysau Mynydd Eryri is working on 10 target plant species and two target invertebrate species as well as their habitats. The target plant species are *Cerastium alpinum*, *Saxifraga rosacea*, *Dryas octopetala*, *Hieracium snowdoniense*, *Saxifraga cespitosa*, *Persicaria vivipara*, *Woodsia alpina*, *Polystichum lonchitis*, *Woodsia ilvensis* and *Saussurea alpina* - all of which are among the rarest plants in Wales. Alongside the two target invertebrates, Snowdon Rainbow Beetle (*Chrysolina cerealis*) and Arctic Pea Clam (*Euglesa conventus*), they are collectively known as Arctic – Alpines. They occurred in Wales between periods of glaciation and are relics left here by the last ice age. Our Arctic – Alpine species are likely to be some of the organisms most threatened by global temperature changes.