

PRESS RELEASE

28 February 2025

Rare lichen moved from Cornwall to East Anglia in bid to improve conservation status in the UK

- Scrambled Egg Lichen became extinct in East of England due to habitat loss, but once thrived there
- Innovative use of book binding glue reattaches lichen
- The project aims to restore biodiversity in the Brecks and the UK

Plantlife has launched a conservation effort to transfer one of England's rarest lichens from the North of Cornwall and reintroduce it to its historic home in East Anglia, more than 350 miles away.

Scrambled Egg Lichen, *Gyalolechia fulgens*, which resembles a plate of scrambled eggs due to its bright yellow, crumbly appearance, is one of three specialist lichens of the Breckland lost from the region where it was once common, along with the Starry Breck Lichen and Scaly Breck Lichen. It became extinct due to habitat loss, resulting from changes in farming, increase in tree cover and a loss of rabbits.

The technique used to move the species, known as translocation, involves carefully removing small patches of the lichen and using either water or book binding glue to reattach them. 200 small pieces of the lichen – about the size of a 20p piece – were removed from Penhale in Cornwall and 160 transplanted into the Breckland chalky landscape.

The Scrambled Egg Lichen is not just a striking species but also a crucial part of the biological soil crust community, which stabilizes soils and facilitates the growth of other plants. Additionally, it hosts a globally rare parasitic fungus, *Lichenochora epifulgens*, which is even rarer than the Scrambled Egg Lichen itself.

The recent State of Nature report revealed that over a quarter (28%) of fungi and lichens are now at risk of extinction, underscoring the urgent need for conservation efforts like this one.

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

"The UK is home to globally significant populations of rare lichen species, some of which are found nowhere else on Earth. However, these species face increasing threats from habitat loss, climate change and air pollution. Projects like this are vital to reversing these declines."

“This is an exciting opportunity to trial a new method for reattaching lichen using book binding glue. If successful, it could pave the way for reintroducing other species lost from the Brecks.”

Jon Cripps, Penale Dunes Ranger for Cornwall Wildlife Trust, added:

“It’s great to be involved in this innovative project with Plantlife and Norfolk Wildlife Trust. The habitat at Penhale supports a significant population of Scrambled Egg Lichen, so we’re more than happy to spare a few. We’ve got our fingers crossed for a successful translocation.”

James Symonds, Weeting Heath Warden for Norfolk Wildlife Trust who manages the Breckland site, added:

“We’ve been hugely lucky to work with Plantlife on a number of occasions across our Breckland Reserves and partner with them on the fantastic work they’ve done changing the fortune of many rare and special species. Bringing back Scrambled-Egg Lichen to the Brecks is exactly the kind of projects we want to see more of in the region and we hope the future continues to look sunny-side up for lichens here.”

Measuring long term success of this translocation will take several years, but early signs are positive, with lichens still in place after 8 weeks. It is hoped that if the lichen shows evidence of growing after one year, it will spread naturally afterwards.

None of this work would have been possible without the support from Cornwall Wildlife Trust, Norfolk Wildlife Trust and the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh, with funding from Natural England as part of the Species Recovery Programme.

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About Plantlife:

Plantlife is the global charity working to enhance, protect, restore and celebrate the wild plants and fungi that are essential to all life on earth. With two in five plant species at risk of extinction, biodiversity loss is now the fastest it’s ever been and Plantlife’s work has never been more vital. Plantlife champions and accelerates conservation action, working at the heart of a global network of individuals and organisations, to influence and inspire landowners and land managers, public and private bodies, governments and local communities. As time begins to run out, Plantlife’s position as the global voice for wild plants and fungi will help to bring lasting and positive change to our natural world – for everyone’s sake.

Notes to editors:

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Media contact:

For more information or to arrange an interview please contact:

press@plantlife.org.uk

jules.walkey@plantlife.org.uk