

Press release: Working to save England's rarest ant from extinction

The narrow-headed ant is England's rarest ant, with the only English population remaining on a small nature reserve run by the Devon Wildlife Trust and the A38 trunk road verge near Chudleigh Knighton.

Highly territorial, this rare woodland creature might be tiny at 10-12mm long but has big importance to the entire ecosystem with the seeds of many plants dependent upon them in areas of newly regenerating forest.

The nests, which can contain several queens and up to 1,000 worker ants, are nestled on a lush A38 verge and adjoining land. We've joined forces with Devon Wildlife Trust and charity Buglife to try and secure a future for these miniature heroes in the UK's ecosystem.

Highways England ecologist Leo Gubert said:

People might think it strange that a road authority would get involved in the survival of a rare ant but they are so endangered every nest counts.

We carry out regular surveys at the nest sites and have an ongoing habitat management plan including scrub and grass clearance as these ants are very particular about where they live.

As more areas of wildlife habitat are lost a wide variety of insects, plant and mammals are finding a safe haven on our roadside verges and by ensuring our network is as wildlife friendly as possible and by enhancing habitats alongside our roads, we might, ultimately, be able to contribute to the halt of biodiversity loss in the UK.

In the South West, we're working with partners including Devon Wildlife Trust, Buglife and Natural England on the 'Back from the Brink Project'. The aim is to conserve and enhance the overall status of narrow-headed ants as part of an overarching project to save 20 species from extinction and benefit over 200 more throughout England.

Andrew Bakere, Devon Wildlife Trust's nature reserve officer for Chudleigh Knighton, said:

We're proud that the narrow headed ant's last refuge in England is on the nature reserve we manage at Chudleigh Knighton Heath. The presence on the roadside verge of one of Devon's busiest roads is a reminder just how precarious the state of much of our wildlife is. We hope that in the future it will spread to find a secure home

elsewhere.

We're committed to a national Biodiversity Plan which is being supported by a £30 million national investment programme over the next five years. The plan recognises road verges and associated land can be managed to provide areas of habitat, relatively free from human access, that may be scarce in the surrounding landscape.

These road verges can also be used to connect fragmented habitats in the wider landscape, enabling plant and animal populations to move and interact, and so become stronger and more resilient.

Narrow-headed ant facts

- You can identify the Narrow-headed ant by the deep notch at the back of its head.
- The narrow-headed ant lives at woodland edges, heathlands and open areas within forests, and is associated with areas of forest regeneration.
- High territorial narrow-headed ants stalk other invertebrates, and will cooperate to take prey larger than themselves.
- When attacking prey or if threatened, they have a secret weapon – acid! A gland in their abdomen produces formic acid, which they can fire up to 10cm, with great accuracy.
- They have also been known to jump on the backs of other species of ants and rip their heads off.
- This ant once lived throughout the UK, including the New Forest, Dorset, the Isle of Wight and Cornwall.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[News story: Charity regulator encourages safer giving for Indonesia Tsunami Appeal](#)

We are issuing advice to those wishing to donate to help the survivors of the earthquake and tsunami that recently struck Central Sulawesi Province,

Indonesia.

This follows the launch of the [Indonesia Tsunami Appeal](#) by the [Disasters Emergency Committee](#) (DEC) on Thursday 4 October 2018. DEC member charities and their local partners are working closely with the Indonesian authorities to get aid to those who urgently need it, as well as helping survivors to cope with the trauma of recent days.

Public support is essential for charities delivering urgently needed clean drinking water, food, medical care and shelter – so it is vital that donations reach genuine charities.

We want people to be able to give confidently to charities working to relieve that need, such as through the DEC appeal to its member charities.

The DEC brings together 14 leading UK aid charities to maximise fundraising and quickly deliver effective emergency relief. They are all registered charities.

Most fundraising is genuine, but we are warning that fraudsters and criminals may sometimes take advantage of public generosity at times of increased giving, using various methods such as fake appeal websites, email appeals that falsely use the name of genuine charities, or appeals from fake charities.

- check the charity's name and registration number on our [online register of charities](#) – it can help you make an informed decision before donating by providing information about each charity, including its charitable purposes and activities, registered contact details, and its compliance and financial history and accounts
- take care when responding to emails or clicking links to a charity's website to ensure that they are genuine – instead, search online for your preferred charity to check you have the right web address
- if you have any concerns about the legitimacy of a request for donations that appears to come from a charity, don't hesitate to contact that charity directly to request further information
- when approached by collectors on the street, check whether they are wearing a proper ID badge and that any collection tin is sealed

If you think that a collection or appeal is not legitimate, report it to the police. If you think the collection is fraudulent report it to Action Fraud over the phone at 0300 123 2040 or [online](#).

You can also [complain about a charity](#) on our website.

Any concerns about fundraising standards should be sent to the [Fundraising Regulator](#).

More information about the appeal for Indonesia is available [on the DEC website](#).

Press release: Extra prison time for waste dumper

Five times in one month large waste piles were dumped illegally outside business sites in Essex and London from a vehicle owned by Patrick Joseph Egan.

Egan, 30, of Grange Road, Grays pleaded guilty at Basildon Crown Court on Monday 8 October to 3 charges of illegally dumping waste using a lorry at sites not permitted to accept it. He was disqualified from driving at the time of the offences and also admitted 2 further charges of 'knowingly causing' the deposit of waste at 2 other locations.

Egan, who is currently serving a prison sentence for similar offences in Beckton in the borough of Newham London Borough Council, was sentenced to a further 2 weeks for each of the 5 offences. These will run concurrently and be added to his current sentence.

Waste was dumped from a lorry outside a business unit on an industrial estate on Motherwell Way, West Thurrock on 4 October 2017 in front of 2 eye witnesses.

On that day, the same vehicle (owned by Egan) was seen reversing into Stifford Clays Road, Grays, the address of an Anglian Water Pumping Station. A witness realised waste had been tipped from the lorry, but couldn't identify the driver.

Later that day, the same type of waste was found dumped at the main entrance gate to Tilda Ltd, in Coldharbour Lane, Rainham. The driver could not be identified.

The following day on 5 October a further pile of waste was discovered dumped illegally outside the closed gates of Barking Power Station. The offence, which took 2 minutes to commit, was caught on camera and identified the same heavy goods vehicle, driven by Egan.

Less than 2 weeks later on 18 October Egan dumped a pile of waste at the same Motherwell Way West Thurrock Industrial Estate in front of 2 eye witnesses.

Just 2 days after that Egan was stopped by Essex Police and his vehicle seized. It was carrying waste.

Landlords of the sites had removed the dumped waste at their own expense.

The court heard that Egan has a previous conviction for operating without a waste carriers licence in January 2017.

After the hearing Enforcement Team Leader Lesley Robertson said:

Fly-tipping is a blight on the countryside. When the amount of waste tipped is this significant, it is not just an eyesore or a huge inconvenience for those whose land have been dumped on, it is waste crime. Waste criminals undermine legitimate businesses, often leaving those dumped on to foot the clean-up.

Mr Egan seems to have had little regard for these people, the public at large or the environment. He was disqualified from driving at the time but dumped lorry loads of waste across Essex and the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham and allowed his vehicle to be used for the same purpose by others.

Anyone who transports or disposes of waste has a Duty of Care to ensure waste is handled correctly and taken to a legitimate permitted facility. Businesses and individuals must check that the person taking away their waste is registered to do so. Egan was not.

If anyone has any information about waste crime they can report it on the Environment Agency's incident hotline 0800 80 70 60 or anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

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News story: Make a pit stop for innovation in combat modelling

Dstl is offering nearly half a million pounds for innovations in machine learning which can model future conflicts.

Digital Catapult is organising and facilitating a Pit Stop (similar to a “hackathon”) event with the aim of identifying innovative ideas for the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) in future Dstl decision-support combat models.

This is designed as an innovation activity where a wide range of Suitably Qualified and Experienced Persons (SQEPs) come together to tackle a specific problem area. Digital Catapult is responsible for the Open Call, reviewing applications, vetting and inviting all potential attendees. At the end of the Pit Stop event participants will be invited to submit proposals to Dstl for follow-on studies, investigations and/or developments arising from the Pit Stop event discussions and activities. Contracts are available up to a total of £400,000.

Most of MOD’s current combat modelling techniques however either represent command decisions through simple rules-based systems or rely heavily on human users to provide the command context, whilst simulation handles the complex conclusions of the outcome.

These systems often require great physical effort to run and only consider a limited set of scenarios, resulting in significant uncertainty regarding outcomes.

As part of ongoing work looking at developing a new suite of capabilities that both reduce the manpower needed to make credible command decisions and enable the simulations to consider a wider range of situations, Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) is seeking to understand how AI can be applied to support this mission.

Mark Gould, Principal Analyst at Dstl, said:

By working with Digital Catapult, Dstl will expand its supplier base to include up and coming small and medium enterprises who are developing exciting innovations in AI and modelling but who don’t currently work with defence. These new suppliers offer us opportunities not only to expand our supplier base but also to explore how innovations being used outside of defence can be used to improve the support we offer to MOD into the future.

For more information and to register your interest visit the [Digital Catapult website](#)

The closing date for the registration is 15 October 2018.