

FISHER'S ESTUARINE MOTH BREEDING PROGRAMME

The Fisher's Estuarine Moth is a rare and highly threatened species. The main stronghold for the species is the Walton Backwaters area of the North Essex coast, where the majority of the population is found at Skipper's Island. This key site for the Moth is severely threatened by flooding, as a consequence of sea level rise and deteriorating sea walls.

Colchester Zoo and Action for the Wild donate technical assistance to support this programme via an off-show area to promote the captive breeding of this species. We also assist with surveying newly created habitats looking for signs of caterpillar feeding and condition of Hog's Fennel plants; this moth species is completely reliant on this plant as its sole larval food, a plant species which itself is also threatened.

In 2022, poor batches of eggs meant that no larvae hatched over the usual period, therefore our keepers put all eggs out into the breeding cages in case of late larval hatching. Some limited evidence of feeding signs were seen and 5 Moths emerged. 7 Moths were collected from Copt Hall to pair with unpaired captive individuals, with 10/11 decent sets of eggs produced.

Some of these eggs will serve to continue the breeding programme in 2023, whilst surplus will be released into newly-created habitat sites around Essex to ensure the long-term survival of this species.

As the majority of the newly-created habitat sites have now been colonised, the captive breeding programme is reaching its final stages as its initial aims and objectives to provide moths for release into new habitats have been achieved.



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