

Insects, plants vanishing from Britain

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Hundreds of species of British insects and plants have been quietly disappearing while public attention has been focused on birds and mammals.

While three species of breeding birds are known to have vanished in the past 100 years, more than 200 insect species have disappeared in 50 years while 88 species of plants and wildflowers have become extinct in a century, The Independent reported. The newspaper announced that part of the purchase price of every copy sold Saturday will be donated to two environmental groups focused on the less glamorous species.

Environmentalists sometimes refer to large mammals and spectacular birds as "charismatic megafauna," the red squirrels and sea eagles that capture public attention. But invertebrates and plants are a much larger part of the country's natural heritage.

Roger Key of English Nature told The Independent that 88 beetles, 56 butterflies and moths, 20 bees, 17 fly species, 14 bugs and hoppers and 12 wasps have become extinct and many others have greatly reduced numbers.

"The true figure is almost certainly higher," Key said. "There may well be things that have gone extinct that we do not know about."

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