



CELEBRITY FARMER IN HUNT FOR RARE BEETLE

Press release – **EMBARGO** 1pm 13 May 2006

Jimmy Doherty, star of BBC TV's 'Jimmy's Farm', is asking members of the public to help search Britain's countryside for a rather unusual treasure – the beautiful and endangered Scarlet malachite beetle.

The Buglife survey is to be launched at Jimmy's Suffolk pig farm on 13th May 2006. "I am very happy to be involved in this brilliant campaign to support the conservation of such a fascinating and elusive insect", he said.

The Scarlet malachite beetle (*Malachius aeneus*) is a metallic red-green beetle less than a centimetre long. The beetle emerges for four brief weeks in May and June and then vanishes. It is thought to spend most of its life as a larva, but repeated efforts to discover exactly where have been unsuccessful.

This year a leading beetle expert (a coleopterist) will be staking out the site of the largest known population of the beetle, watching the insect's comings and goings to try to discover more about its hidden life - where it emerges from and where it goes to in winter. He will also be investigating a strange coincidence that may hold the key to the mystery of the beetle. "All of the known beetle sites are close to a thatched cottage," says Buglife's Jamie Roberts. "It's possible therefore that the beetle over-winters in thatch. It could be that the decline of the beetle is linked to the disappearance of thatch from large areas of the country."

The beetle has declined so much that it is now found in only a handful of small sites in the UK and is struggling because as an adult it relies upon unspoilt wildflower meadows, many of which have been lost to modern agriculture and development in recent years.

Last year's successful pilot survey in the east of England attracted hundreds of calls from the public and led to the discovery of five new sites. This year the hunt will be widened to cover counties where the beetle was once found, including Somerset, Dorset, Hampshire, Kent and Surrey.

This year's survey leaflet can be downloaded from www.buglife.org.uk. If you think you have seen a Scarlet malachite beetle contact Buglife or send a digital photo to scarlet.malachite@buglife.org.uk

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

Buglife-The Invertebrate Conservation Trust is the first organisation in Europe devoted to the conservation of all invertebrates, and is actively engaged in saving Britain's rarest bugs, bees, ants, spiders, beetles and many more fascinating invertebrates. Launched in April 2004, Buglife currently has seven members of staff working on diverse projects including a national bumblebee survey, riverfly conservation and producing a range of colourful bug posters. For more information on invertebrates – and what you can do to help these amazing animals – visit www.buglife.org.uk

The Scarlet malachite beetle (*Malachius aeneus*) has only been found on a very few sites in recent years. It is a UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species and is listed as Red Data Book 2 – Vulnerable. Research on the beetle's ecology is being undertaken by a national beetle expert at a site near the Essex-Hertfordshire border. The 2006 Scarlet malachite beetle survey has been made possible with support from **Notcutts Garden Centres**, the **Essex Environment Trust** and the **Idlewild Trust**.

Jimmy Doherty is now known for his pig farming and sausage-making enterprise featured in the recent BBC2 series, but has been a beetle enthusiast since his university days. He has a strong personal connection with the Scarlet malachite beetle, having come from the village of Clavering in Essex, only a stone's throw from one of the last sites where the rare and elusive species is known to live.

Details of the survey launch

Venue: Essex Pig Company, Pannington Hall Farm, Wherstead, Suffolk, IP9 2AR

Date: Saturday 13th May 2006

Time: 12 noon. Bug walks will take place between 1-3pm.

Photos of the beetle and its habitat are available in electronic format on request.

For more information please contact Buglife:

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