



Press release –** EMBARGO **– 1.00am 24th June 2006

Experts concerned by decline of rare beetle

New research reveals that the rare Scarlet malachite beetle – one of the government’s priorities for conservation action – has suffered a massive decline at its main site in the UK. Conservation charity Buglife is worried that the beetle may be heading for extinction.

The Scarlet malachite beetle (*Malachius aeneus*) is a colourful scarlet and metallic green insect that can sit on your thumbnail. Like many invertebrates much of its life cycle is a mystery. Since 2005 Buglife has been running public surveys for the beetle. The species is found at just ten small sites, making it one of the UK’s most threatened species.

Daily population counts undertaken by villagers at the Essex site show that the beetle’s numbers have collapsed by over 75% in the past three years, from 800 individuals in 2004 to just 150 today. The exact reasons for the decline are unclear, although a shortage of suitable habitat and climate fluctuations are being suggested as the two likely culprits. As an adult the beetle lives on unspoilt wildflower meadows, many of which have been lost to modern agriculture and development in recent years. And it only emerges briefly for four weeks in May and June, making it vulnerable to prolonged bouts of cold, wet weather.

According to Jamie Roberts of Buglife, the plight of the Scarlet malachite beetle is similar to that of many other endangered invertebrates. ‘Species restricted to isolated fragments of habitat are extremely vulnerable to neglect or insensitive management. A handful of small nature reserves cannot solve this problem – if we want to halt extinctions we need to manage the whole landscape in a more environmentally sensitive way.’

News of the decline follows concerns earlier this week that many of the UK’s 4,000 species of beetle are under threat, with severe consequences for the health and functioning of our ecosystem. There is a danger that the Scarlet Malachite beetle will become another of the 250 species reported as missing, feared extinct.

Buglife is raising awareness of the beetle and other threatened invertebrates as part of National Insect Week (19th to 25th June).

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, butterflies, snails, bees, wasps, ants, spiders, beetles and many more fascinating creatures. Set up in 2000, the charity now has seven members of staff working on diverse projects including a bumblebee survey and brownfield conservation. **For more information on the work of Buglife go to: 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.

National Insect Week is held every two years. It aims to raise awareness about the importance of insects and the need to study and conserve them – they are as Buglife Vice-President Edward O Wilson said ‘the small things that run the world’. For more information about events and activities during National Insect Week go to **<http://www.nationalinsectweek.co.uk/>**

For further information on the Scarlet Malachite beetle call Jamie Roberts on 01733 201210.

This project gratefully acknowledges the support of **Essex Environment Trust, English Nature** and the **Idlewild Trust**.