

NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND MEDIA RELEASE

4 February 2019

Mothbusters called in to halt Newhailes' bothersome bug problem

A plague of moths is threatening to harm the historic collection at Newhailes House near Musselburgh and the National Trust for Scotland is this week beginning its biggest ever management programme to rid the house of the insatiable insects, combining a deep clean with a deep freeze.

Two industrial freezers, each the size of a shipping crate, have been installed at the property. Over the next two months, the entire textile collection – from carpets and curtains to sofas, chairs and clothing - will undergo a sub zero treatment to freeze and destroy the moth eggs and larvae.

Items will be wrapped in acid-free tissue paper, then covered in polythene before being placed in the freezers where temperatures will drop to 35C (-31F). Staff will then use specialist back-mounted vacuum cleaners to reach in to every nook and crannie of the house to clean away the moths.

Owned by conservation charity the National Trust for Scotland, Newhailes House was once home to the influential Dalrymple family, who gave the house its library, rococo interiors and collections of paintings, ceramics and furniture.

Staff at the property noticed a sharp rise in the 'webbing clothes moth' or common clothes moth in 2016 and have been managing the problem with localised treatment and targeted deep cleaning. Moth numbers, and damage, have continued and the organisation is implementing the freeze programme to protect the Newhailes collection.

The charity has used freezers to destroy moths at other properties but on a small scale using chest-sized freezers. The two, 20-foot long freezers that are being deployed at Newhailes represent the organisation's biggest ever attempt to keep moth numbers down.

Mel Houston, National Preventive Conservator at the National Trust for Scotland said:

"This is the biggest project that the National Trust for Scotland has ever undertaken to tackle a pest problem like this and protect the important collections here at Newhailes. In the last year moth numbers at Newhailes have exploded and we've seen a four-fold increase in how many we're finding. We're lucky to have been able to catch the problem at just the right time; when we're able to do something to control the moths before really serious damage is done.

“The deep freeze and deep clean gives us the confidence that we’re killing off as many moths as we can. We’ll never get rid of them completely but we’ll be able to get down to the level where they can be controlled.”

A team of mothbusting volunteers has been recruited to work with the Trust’s collection and conservation team to undertake the low temperature treatment, deep cleaning of the historic interior, and collection movements.

Over the course of the project, the National Trust for Scotland will be running tours so members of the public can learn about the damage that the insects have caused and see the moth management programme in action.

Public tours will run Feb 6, 13, 20, 27 and March 6, 13. Tours will be 10:00-11:10 and 14:00-15:10. £8 pp. Recommended age 14+.

To learn more about the project, go to www.nts.org.uk/visit/events/conservation-tour-moth-project

– ENDS –

