

Butterfly Conservation: Highlights of 2016



State of Nature 2016

BC played a key role in providing data for the new State of Nature report, produced in association with 52 other wildlife NGOs and research bodies. The overall picture is gloomy with over half (56%) of UK species having declined since 1970, while more than one in ten (1,199 species) of the nearly 8000 species assessed are under threat of disappearing altogether from the UK. The report also described many inspiring examples of conservation action that are helping to turn the tide. At the launch our President, Sir David Attenborough, said “Millions of people in the UK care very passionately about nature and the environment and I believe that we can work together to turn around the fortunes of wildlife.”



Chairs and Chief Executives of the 2020 Group of Species NGOs

Working in partnership

During the year we strengthened our partnership with 6 other species NGOs: RSPB, Plantlife, Buglife, Bat Conservation Trust, Bumblebee Conservation Trust and Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust. We are working on a suite of projects where we believe we can achieve more by working together. They include providing cross tax farm advice via www.farmwildlife.info, sharing best practice on nature reserves, increasing political support by appointing MPs as Species Champions, and a major new Back from the Brink project (see below)

Back from the Brink: turning the tide for threatened species in England

As part of the work of the 2020 Species NGO group, we received funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to develop a ground-breaking project aimed at stopping 20 species from becoming extinct and helping a further 204 threatened species. It also aims to inspire the next generation to care for England's most vulnerable wildlife. Working with Natural England we are planning seven landscape scale projects across England and twelve projects aimed at highly threatened species.

The total project will cost £7.6m and, if successful, the bulk (£4.5m) will come from HLF. The partnership approach has already proved highly successful in raising £1.5m in matched funding, mostly from sources which would not fund us separately. BC is leading on two major projects: the Cotswolds in Gloucestershire for the Large Blue and Duke of Burgundy; and Rockingham Forest in Northamptonshire where we hope to restore habitats for woodland species and re-introduce the Chequered Skipper to England in our anniversary year of 2018 (see picture).



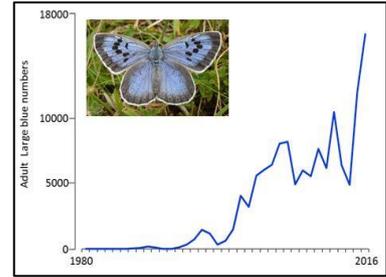
Funding successes

We have had a wonderful year raising funds for threatened species, including a major grant of £318k from HLF for All the Moor Butterflies project. This is aimed at saving some of our most threatened fritillaries on Dartmoor, Exmoor and Bodmin. We have also successfully raised funds from Landfill Operators for five projects: New Forest Fritillaries for the Future (£46k); Large Blue and Duke of Burgundy in the Cotswolds (£43k) South Essex Woods Heath Fritillary (£49k); Chilterns Duke of Burgundy (£37k). These will be matched from a highly successful Match Pot appeal to members which has already raised £80k and will run into the New Year.

SPECIES SUCCESSES

Large Blue has best year since 1930s

Thanks to years of effort by Butterfly Conservation and its partners, the globally endangered Large Blue reached its highest numbers for 80 years. Since its extinction in 1976, the Large Blue has been restored to over 50 sites in south-west England carefully managed by a range of organisations, including two Wildlife Trusts and the National Trust. Many other rare insects have also flourished as well as rare plants like the Fly, Frog and Musk Orchids.



Small Blue havens

The Small Blue is one of our rarest butterflies and, in the West Midlands, was reduced to just three small colonies by 2009. Under a series of Landfill funded projects its fortunes have since been completely reversed. Contractors have cleared over 42 ha scrub and volunteers have put in more than 700 days of time to restore overgrown areas of grassland, sowing Kidney Vetch seeds and planting 13,000 plug plants across 28 sites. The results have been incredibly positive, with the Small Blue spreading to 19 sites by 2016, representing a six-fold increase in numbers in Warwickshire. Many other species have benefitted including the Dingy Skipper and Grizzled Skipper.

Striped Lychnis moth thrives

The Striped Lychnis is an extremely rare moth found only in a few sites in Hants, W Sussex, Berks, Bucks and Oxon. Its sole larval food-plant is Dark Mullein. Under a grant from Landfill operators Veolia, we created a series of scrapes to encourage the food-plant on roadside verges and on our reserve at Magdalen Hill Down. Volunteers from our Upper Thames Branch also planted Dark Mullein on road verges and reserves. The early results have proved extremely promising with good numbers of larvae on managed areas.



High Brown Fritillary: This endangered butterfly is bucking the national trend in Exmoor's Heddon Valley, with numbers increasing following concerted habitat management through the Two Moors Threatened Butterfly Project. The butterfly has increased by 646% between 2002 and 2016, and it was recorded on a new site this year following targeted scrub control. Plans are underway to increase the work under the All the Moor Butterflies Project in 2017.

Making a Stand for the Wood White: Thanks to a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, this three year project is working across four landscapes in the West Midlands to maintain or improve suitable habitats for the highly threatened Wood White. BC volunteers have found four new sites in Shropshire and Herefordshire. Breeding has been observed at Colstey Wood for the first time and Wood White reintroductions have taken place at two sites. At FC's Bury Ditches, 150 Wood Whites were seen, up from just 42 in 2015!



Making the most of Countryside Stewardship

Through the Farmland Butterfly and Moth Initiative, we have promoted the best management for priority butterflies and moths within the English Countryside Stewardship Scheme. In addition to our landscape project work, we have run training courses and liaised with over 70 Natural England advisers. Our regional staff have given advice on around 200 sites for priority species where agri-environment schemes are active. We are also using the project to help some of our dwindling widespread species by improving habitats on farms and promoting measures to help pollinators.

OUTREACH WORK

Landowner Group Flourishing at the Wyre Forest

The Wyre Forest Facilitation Group has really got going in 2016. The group now has 35 members (compared to 10 in 2015) and 80 local landowner contacts. Eleven events were run in 2016 including training days on woodland management and wild pollinators. Six of our members submitted Countryside Stewardship applications. The project is well on its way to building a landscape of interested landowners who are keen to work together for wildlife which includes beneficial management for our key Lepidoptera.



Wild Pollinators day at Lower Smite Farm (WWT)



Developing volunteers in Northern Ireland

Thanks to funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, we started a new two-year project called The Butterfly Files aimed at developing our volunteer and recorder base in Northern Ireland. The Project Officer, Rose Cremin, organised 10 workshops and spoke at 15 partner events attended by over 1,100 people to encourage them to get involved. Of all countries of the UK, Northern Ireland is the least well recorded. The new volunteers will collect essential

information to help us understand the abundance and distribution of butterflies and moths in Northern Ireland, which will enable us to prioritise conservation effort and monitor target species.



Urban Butterfly Project takes off in Scotland

The Urban Butterfly Project was launched in April of this year with the twin aims of enhancing urban habitats for butterflies and moths, and encouraging urban dwellers to record them. Over 70 people attended butterfly ID and recording events, submitting hundreds of records of butterflies from Scotland's urban areas and beyond. One stark finding was the almost complete absence of Common Blue and Small Copper from urban spaces, so these two species will be targeted for special action. For example we are working with Glasgow City Council to grow wildflower plugs for planting by volunteers in 2017.

RESERVES



Restoration continues at Median Farm in South Wales

The third year of Marsh Fritillary habitat restoration took a big step forward. Fifteen work parties and 12 bonfires by the dedicated band of volunteers cleared huge quantities of brash where we are rescuing marshy grassland from scrub. In the open grassland, the warm, wet winter produced phenomenal vegetation growth. Cows were brought in for fourteen weeks and did a fantastic job demolishing the rank grasses. The fields will take a few years to recover from such drastic action by which stage colonisation of Marsh Fritillary from our adjacent Caeau Ffos Fach reserve will be possible.



Habitat restoration at Wester Moss reserve

A programme of work has been underway for several years at our Wester Moss reserve near Stirling to stop it from drying up and becoming covered in scrub. This has included the installation of around 50 dams across old drainage ditches and the creation of a 500 metre peat bund in the driest part of the Moss. Two years ago there were no pools on site and no records of breeding dragonflies. The new pools created have allowed the colonisation of at least six species of dragonfly, including Common and Southern Hawker, Common and Black Darter, and Emerald and Blue-tailed Damselflies.



RESEARCH AND MONITORING

Garden Butterfly Survey goes online

The Garden Butterfly Survey was initiated back in 1990 by Margaret Vickery and around 1,000 gardens participated via paper records. This year the survey has moved online and opened up so that the public can submit records, using a bespoke website built gratis by Peter Eeles. We were delighted to secure sponsorship from B&Q who promoted the count to their customers as part of its push to encourage wildlife friendly gardening. Despite 2016 being a general poor year for butterflies, over 56,000 records for 2016 were submitted from over 2,300 gardens across the UK. The results will help us build a picture of the fortunes of our garden butterflies and help us provide better advice for gardeners.



Butterfly monitoring milestone

The UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2016, with a conference attended by over 120 people. The star attraction was Dr Ernie Pollard, the inventor of the simple but effective method of monitoring butterflies along a fixed route, or transect. His discovery was made back in 1973 whilst working for the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology at Monks Wood, but the scheme did not start until 1976. Since then a remarkable 27 million butterflies have been counted during 380,000 visits to 4,425 sites. To complete this gargantuan task, volunteers have walked 850,000km, that is as far as here to the moon and back! The scheme is now run by BC in collaboration with the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and the British Trust for Ornithology. It provides one of the richest datasets on wildlife trends anywhere in the world and over 100 scientific papers have been written on topics such as the impact of habitat management, climate change, migration and conservation priorities.



ADVOCACY

Politicians become Species Champions

As part of a drive to raise awareness of wildlife amongst politicians, we have joined in a joint initiative with other NGOs to appoint Species Champions of threatened species. So far three Westminster MPs have adopted Lepidoptera species: Marsh Fritillary, Striped Lychnis, and Duke of Burgundy. In Scotland, over eight MSPs have signed up or renewed their pledge to help rare species.



NEW CHIEF EXECUTIVE



Sir David welcomes new Acting Chief Executive

After 23 years working for BC, Martin Warren decided to step down as Chief Executive at the end of 2016 to pursue his interests on European butterflies. Council have appointed Julie Williams as Acting CEO from January 2017 to provide continuity and ensure the organisation continues to thrive. Julie has worked for BC for 16 years and has been Deputy CEO for several years, so she brings enormous expertise and enthusiasm to the job. Martin will continue to work part-time for BC Europe, developing our European network.

THANK YOU!

Your support of Butterfly Conservation has made these achievements possible.

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