



# **brownfields** for **butterflies**

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**Brownfield sites are havens for some of  
Britain's most threatened and best-loved  
butterflies and moths**

Conserving brownfields can make an important contribution to biodiversity and people's enjoyment of wildlife and the natural world. Brownfield (previously-developed) sites that have become naturalised over a period of time, can be a real asset...

- ▶ **Supporting significant biodiversity, providing valuable habitat for many widespread butterflies and moths, as well as several threatened species.**
- ▶ **Providing a valuable recreational, educational and accessible wildlife resource for local communities.**

Some important brownfield sites are under threat from redevelopment and inappropriate restoration. This leaflet explains how to identify the best brownfield sites for butterflies and moths, and what can be done to enhance their wildlife interest.

## greenfield deserts and brownfield havens

Many of our 59 species of butterfly and over 2500 species of moth are threatened by changes to the countryside, such as agricultural intensification and afforestation. In contrast, the urban landscape, including brownfields, as well as post-industrial sites such as disused quarries, railways, mine spoil, sand and gravel pits, often support strong colonies of butterflies and moths.

The best brownfield sites for wildlife are those that are allowed to be colonised naturally, slowly developing into grassland, heathland, wetland, scrub and woodland. Particularly important for butterflies and moths though, are areas of sparse vegetation. The combination of caterpillar foodplants, nectar sources for adults, bare ground and shelter, provide the right conditions for warmth-loving species.

Around 30 species of butterfly are associated with brownfield sites, including many common and familiar ones, such as the Red Admiral, Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell. Brownfield sites are also key habitats for scarce and declining species such as the Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper, Green Hairstreak, Small Blue, Silver-studded Blue and Grayling.



Many species of moths are also found on brownfield sites, including Burnet Companion, Mother Shipton, Latticed Heath, Six-spot Burnet, as well as scarcer species such as the Wormwood Shark.

**Butterflies and moths respond very rapidly to change and are therefore good indicators of the health of brownfield and urban habitats.**

### Maximising opportunities for brownfield butterflies and moths

- **Early consultation:**  
Seeking conservation advice at the earliest planning stages enables retention of important habitats within development plans, saving time and money by avoiding later redesign.
- **Redevelopment:**  
When brownfield sites are redeveloped for housing, industry or landfill, prime butterfly and moth habitat may be destroyed. By retaining areas of natural vegetation, plants and animals can recolonise following restoration.
- **Restoration:**  
Restoration schemes within developments often create amenity grassland or woodland, which does not support the open, varied habitats of brownfield land. Restoration schemes which focus on natural colonisation may offset biodiversity losses due to redevelopment.
- **Management:**  
Butterfly and moth habitat requires positive management and may disappear from brownfield sites through neglect, as open conditions are lost to scrub and woodland. To prevent sparse vegetation from disappearing, occasional disturbance or scrub clearance is usually required.
- **Amenity opportunities:**  
If managed appropriately brownfield land can bring people and wildlife together in an urban setting and in so doing provide a valuable recreational and educational resource.

## How you can help

- **Surveys:**  
The biodiversity of brownfield sites can only be identified through survey and evaluation. A butterfly survey requires a minimum of three visits, in spring, early and mid-summer to record the species present. For moths, visits in summer, but also ideally in spring and autumn, are required.
- **Evaluation:**  
Good brownfield sites support a wide range of common butterflies, which indicates a valuable wildlife resource. The presence of one or more of the scarcer species is even more important, irrespective of how many common species are present.
- **Development opportunities:**  
Wherever possible safeguard the most important site features for butterflies and moths. Appropriate mitigation measures, as a planning condition, can help alleviate any habitat loss. Ensure habitat creation techniques focus on natural colonisation rather than specific planting.
- **Aftercare:**  
Long-term management for butterflies and moths (e.g. periodic ground disturbance and rotational scrub clearance) should be incorporated as a planning condition and implemented, together with appropriate monitoring.
- **Seeking advice:**  
Contact Butterfly Conservation for further information on recording butterflies, technical advice or for comment on development proposals (a list of local contacts is available from our website below). A leaflet, 'Butterflies in Towns and Cities', provides more detailed management advice for urban habitats. Further information on butterflies and moths can also be found on our website.



# Butterfly Conservation

Saving butterflies, moths and their habitats

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