EXPANDING THE LARGE BLUE LANDSCAPE IN THE POLDEN HILLS
PROJECT UPDATE
JUNE 2013

Project Summary
Expanding the Large Blue Landscape in the Polden Hills aims to extend the current area of suitable habitat for the butterfly across 14 Limestone grassland sites. The project started in June 2011 and is now entering its third and final year.

The management and grazing on the project sites is carefully targeted from the results of habitat assessments, Large Blue monitoring and ant surveys. Each site manager and or owner receives detailed advice on where to target the scrub management with a tailored grazing regime according to the livestock used by their grazer.

Project Achievements
Work delivered through contractors commenced in July 2011 with some weed control followed by winter scrub management. The volunteer element of the project started in 2012. The following is a summary of what the project has achieved so far:

Scrub Management
To restore and extend the areas of Limestone grassland on the project sites some of the scrub that has been encroaching the grassland needs to be removed.

- A total of 15 volunteer scrub management days have been held on seven different sites, they were attended by 163 individuals who worked a total 664 volunteer hours. National Trust and Somerset Wildlife Trust staff and volunteers have combined forces to work on each other’s sites.
- An additional 6.5ha of scrub has been cleared by contractors across eleven sites and another 4ha is planned for this coming winter.

Thyme Planting
Many sites have been left ungrazed for long periods of time leading to the decline of the Large Blue’s foodplant, Wild Thyme.

- Cuttings from local sites have been delivered to five local nurseries: BWG, Groves, Bridgwater College, Sweet Acre and YSJ Seeds, who have propagated them ready to be planted back out onto project sites.
- Total of 7405 plants have now been planted in targeted areas across seven site. 80% have been planted by volunteers, involving 172 individuals over 16 days, totaling 553 planting hours! National Trust and Somerset Wildlife Trust staff and volunteers again combined forces to achieve this.
Weed Control
The first plant species to regenerate in areas that have had scrub removed are nettles, bramble and thistles. Controlling these species is essential to restore the Limestone grassland successfully.

- Contractors have completed 68 days of 'ruderal' management on areas that have had scrub management on eight sites
- Weed control will be taking place during 2013 on most sites at the end of the summer growing period

Grazing
Grazing regimes are tailored for each project site and delivered through our specialist contractor. Grazing is needed to create a short turf which will encourage the colonisation of the Large Blue host ant *Myrmica sabuleti*.

Weather conditions over the last two years have been difficult and the heavy rainfall produces a tall and lush sward. This has created a situation where graziers have had to respond with brief periods of increased or ‘pulse’ grazing to reduce the turf height for successful Large Blue breeding and colonisation.

- Site managers and owners are advised to graze their sites in general and dependent on their graziers livestock during August-September, November-January and March-April
- Most of the project sites are now implementing a tailored grazing regime with advice from our specialist contractor

Monitoring and Events
- Monitoring takes place on all 14 project sites involving project partner staff and volunteers.
- There are a total of five UKBMS butterfly transects being walked weekly from April to September.
- 19 separate events have taken place on sites or other venues to encourage volunteers to become involved with the project.
- Events include the Large Blue Training Day at Collard Hill, Green Down Open Day, Identification days at East Field LNR, Yeovil Country Fayre 2012.
Project Success

Increasing Large Blue egg numbers, ant distribution and two colonisations says it all!

- Large Blue butterfly populations have increased in size on three of the project sites.
- Two natural colonisations of the Large Blue were recorded in 2012 on project sites.
- Ant survey results for most sites are reflecting an increase in *M. sabuleti* numbers.

![Estimated egg numbers at Collard Hill](image)

Source: CEH/Oxford University

Project Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Site Owner</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Meeting Place</th>
<th>Contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/07/2013</td>
<td>10:30am-12:30pm</td>
<td>East Field LNR</td>
<td>South Somerset District Council</td>
<td>Guided Walk</td>
<td>East Field LNR, Windmill Road, Entrance Gate, ST437305</td>
<td>Caroline Kelly email: <a href="mailto:ckgelly@butterfly-conservation.org">ckgelly@butterfly-conservation.org</a> or telephone 01929 406029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31/07-01/08/2013</td>
<td>10:30am-3pm</td>
<td>East Field LNR</td>
<td>South Somerset District Council</td>
<td>Summer Scything</td>
<td>East Field LNR, Windmill Road, Entrance Gate, ST437306</td>
<td>Caroline Kelly email: <a href="mailto:ckgelly@butterfly-conservation.org">ckgelly@butterfly-conservation.org</a> or telephone 01929 406029</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For all events it is advisable to have an up-to-date tetanus vaccination. All tools and training are provided but please wear suitable outdoor clothing and footwear. We recommend bringing a packed lunch and a drink unless otherwise indicated. Lots of tea/coffee and biscuits are available throughout the day.

For further information on the project please visit our website at [www.butterfly-conservation/conservation projects](http://www.butterfly-conservation/conservation projects) or if you would like to become involved contact Caroline Kelly, Conservation Officer, Butterfly Conservation email: ckgelly@butterfly-conservation.org or telephone 01929 406029

BC Somerset and Bristol also have [events over the next few months](http://www.butterfly-conservation/conservation projects) please look at their website to find something near you!

Expanding the Large Blue in the Polden Hills would not have been possible without the co-operation and support of the project partners and grant funding from SITA Trust and BBC Wildlife Fund as well as the BC Large Blue Appeal and BC Somerset branch donation. Acknowledgements must go to the staff and volunteers of J&F Clark Trust, National Trust, Natural England, Somerset Wildlife Trust, South Somerset District Council and the private landowners who have been involved and supported the project.

Many thanks to the involvement of Butterfly conservation branch volunteers and all the other individuals who have attended conservation days and help with monitoring on the project sites. Your enthusiasm and involvement in the project is invaluable and we hope it will continue into the future.

The Large Blue Project is underpinned by science, carried out by Oxford University and CEH and implemented by a collaborative partnership between Butterfly Conservation, CEH, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, J&F Clark Trust, National Trust, Natural England, Network Rail, Oxford University, Somerset Wildlife Trust, South Somerset District Council and private landowners.

Images kindly provided by: Caroline Kelly, Dave Simcox, Peter Eles, Sarah Meredith