



Position Statement on Reintroductions and Introductions

Butterflies and moths have undergone declines in both distribution and abundance, due to a multitude of direct and indirect factors including habitat loss, habitat fragmentation and climate change. The majority of conservation effort is directed at protecting and improving habitat quality to allow species to respond or re-colonise naturally. Reintroductions and introductions are an important method to facilitate the deliberate arrival of a species at a site where natural colonisation may not be possible, due to factors such as isolation. Carried out properly, following best practice guidelines, reintroductions are an important part of the modern conservation tool kit.

Any reintroduction or introduction effort should adhere to internationally recognised guidelines.

A properly managed reintroduction or introduction attempt:

- will identify reasons for a species' decline,
- remove factors that caused extinction at the receptor site/s,
- identify receptor site/s that are large enough to sustain a viable population,
- ensure receptor and donor sites have a long-term management plan to provide both areas with sufficient habitat to ensure long term viability.

Undocumented releases, which may confuse existing conservation effort and disrupt the recording of species' natural ranges and trends, should not be conducted.

Recommendations for Reintroductions and Introductions

Background

Butterfly Conservation recommends priority is given to conserving existing populations in the areas where they occur naturally, while promoting improvements in land management to enable butterflies and moths to re-colonise former areas and to extend their ranges naturally.

Butterfly Conservation will support reintroductions if they are in line with its 2026 Strategy, are an integral part of a species recovery strategy and our staff have been fully consulted from the inception of the project.

Butterfly Conservation will only devote its own resources to a reintroduction where a species is at risk of extinction, the habitat extent and quality is suitably restored, the species has no realistic chance of re-colonising naturally, or the species is unable to naturally track suitable climate envelopes due to low dispersal ability or fragmented habitat.

Recommendations

Reintroductions require a significant investment of resources and capacity. To ensure any reintroduction or introduction of butterflies and moths is successful, and that the wider conservation community can learn from it, we recommend the following guidelines:

1. The reintroduction should follow the [IUCN Guidelines for Reintroductions and Other Conservation Translocations 2013](#) and the relevant country guidelines (see links below).
2. The reintroduction and associated habitat management has the permission and support of the landowner/s of the donor and receptor sites. Opportunities to restore networks of populations are preferable to single-site reintroductions.
3. A species is on the verge of local extinction from a site or network, and natural re-establishment is unlikely.
4. The proposal does not conflict with requirements or provisions for legally protected species or sites.
5. Enough individuals should be used in the reintroduction to ensure a reasonable chance of establishing a genetically diverse population.
6. Where possible, the donor stock should be drawn from populations that are geographically close to the receptor site, and/or which have similar habitat and climatic conditions.
7. When captive breeding is required, the necessary knowledge, expertise and facilities must be in place. Stock for reintroduction should not normally have been captive bred for more than two generations because of the problems of disease, in-breeding and adaptation.
8. Careful consideration is given to the possibly adverse effects of habitat modification carried out for the reintroduction on other species of conservation concern in the area.
9. The whole population should benefit, both at the donor site and the receptor site.
10. The habitat requirements of the species and the reasons for its decline are understood, and the causes of its extinction on the receptor site have been removed.

11. There should be a long-term management plan which will aim to provide sufficient suitable habitat for the species concerned, and the landscape around the receptor site should be large enough to sustain a viable population.
12. The proposal and selection of donor and receptor sites arises from a recovery strategy for the species.
13. The reintroduction is properly monitored, recorded, and evaluated.
14. Documentation of all reintroductions is shared with Butterfly Conservation, the relevant county butterfly or moth recorder and the local record centre.
15. Butterfly Conservation considers that translocations to permit the destruction of sites occupied by rare and threatened species is unacceptable.
16. For importation of stock from outside the UK there are additional considerations including relevant licenses, permissions from statutory organisations and disease-risk management strategies required by Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Further Advice

- For advice on preparing reintroduction plans please contact Butterfly Conservation's Head of Ecology.
- Butterfly Conservation will be producing a review of recent reintroductions and introductions alongside case studies to share best practice.

Country Guidelines

- England: [Reintroductions and other conservation translocations: code and guidance for England](#)
- Wales: [Species Licencing](#)
- Scotland: [Reintroducing Native Species](#)
- Northern Ireland: [Wildlife Licencing](#)

Glossary

The definitions used are drawn from those given in the 'IUCN Guidelines for Reintroductions and Other Conservation Translocations' 2013.

Introduction – termed 'Assisted Colonisation' in the IUCN guidelines to define an attempt to establish a species, for the purpose of conservation, outside its recorded distribution but within an appropriate habitat.

Reintroduction – the intentional movement and release of a species¹ within an area which was once part of its historical² range, but from which it has been extirpated or become extinct³.

Re-establishment – a synonym for reintroduction but carrying the implication that the attempt has been successful.

Reinforcement / Supplementation – the intentional movement and release of a butterfly or moth to strengthen and diversify an existing population by the addition of individuals of the same species.

Translocation – the deliberate action of moving individuals from one area with release at another area, to effect one of the above.

Release – in the simplest sense the action of letting go live animals, but more often used to describe opportunistic, undocumented or clandestine efforts.

Restoration – The overall purpose and context for re-introduction attempts. In this document use of the term should be assumed to mean it has an objective and planned strategic basis.

¹ or recognised sub-species or race

² for practical reasons should be limited to known or recorded native range

³ A taxon is extinct when there is no reasonable doubt that the last individual has died. The causes may be both human induced and /or natural.