



Butterfly Conservation

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

Butterfly Conservation

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President Sir David Attenborough CH, FRS

The Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London
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18 September 2024

Dear Secretary of State,

Butterflies are dying.

Following a record low for butterflies this year, Butterfly Conservation is declaring a Butterfly Emergency. Now, we need the Government to declare a Nature Emergency and take immediate action before it's too late.

Butterfly Conservation is the UK charity dedicated to saving butterflies and moths. Each year, its Big Butterfly Count – the biggest citizen science project of its kind in the world – helps us assess the health of our environment. The average number of butterflies spotted per Big Butterfly Count in 2024 was the lowest in the 14-year history of the scheme. The results are in line with wider evidence that the summer of 2024 has been very poor for butterflies. But this isn't just one bad year.

80% of butterflies in the UK have declined since the 1970s.

Half of all British butterfly species are Red Listed as threatened or Near Threatened with extinction.

Butterflies are an important indicator species, and they have been sounding the alarm that something is wrong for some time. Years of habitat destruction and fragmentation, climate breakdown and pesticide use have taken their toll.

You have suggested that we need “accelerated action” to tackle the dire state of nature in the UK. Our evidence shows we need immediate action if we are to restore nature and save our butterflies and moths.

We are asking your government to declare a Nature Emergency and, as a first point of action, to ban butterfly-killing neonicotinoid pesticides permanently and without exception.

We welcome the recent pledge already made on this issue by your department. But we no longer have time for pledges – we need action. Neonicotinoid pesticides are a major cause of butterfly declines and a threat to countless other pollinators.

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While banning neonicotinoid pesticides won't solve the Butterfly Emergency or the Nature Emergency, it is a vital first step in restoring butterfly numbers.

Over the past 14 years that the Big Butterfly Count has been running, participants across the UK have had to watch as butterflies once common in their gardens and local green spaces have dwindled and even disappeared.

Wildlife-lovers, gardeners, farmers and countless others up and down the UK have been sharing their worry and their concern as they ask, 'where are all the butterflies?'

Butterfly Conservation has shown through conservation action that we can turn things around. But we simply do not have the resources to tackle declines of this magnitude alone.

The Nature Emergency is bigger than Butterfly Conservation. It is bigger than DEFRA. And addressing it must be the mission of the entire Government. It's time to stand up and show a departure from the policies that have led us to this point and start to restore nature now.

The road ahead is clear. Declare a Nature Emergency. Ban neonicotinoid pesticides without exception. And start the process of bringing back our butterflies before it is too late.

Signed,
