Although the foodplants of the Dingy Skipper are common and found in a wide variety of habitats, the butterfly appears to be in rapid decline. Many colonies, particularly those on brownfield sites have been lost to redevelopment, while other sites have become overgrown. As sites are lost, remaining small colonies become more isolated and vulnerable to extinction. 

The Dingy Skipper has declined nationally by 42% in recent decades. The butterfly receives no legal protection in England and this has contributed to a number of important sites being lost in the North-east.

In response to these concerns, Butterfly Conservation has initiated a project aimed at securing the future of the Dingy Skipper in North-east England. A major objective is to identify and survey all Dingy Skipper sites in the region.

This is where you can help!
The regional distribution map shows that you are just as likely to see the Dingy Skipper in or near urban areas as you are in the open countryside. Butterfly Conservation would be delighted to hear from anyone willing to help with survey work. If you would like to help assess butterfly numbers at a known site, we can provide details of the sites nearest to where you live. Alternately, you may wish to discover new sites. Any site where the foodplants are abundant is worth a visit during May or June.

Butterfly Conservation can provide a survey pack to help you. If you feel you lack the experience required to undertake survey work, we are running a series of workshops and site visits aimed at enabling you to identify the butterfly and record vital information about Dingy Skipper sites.

Where can you see Dingy Skipper in North-east England?

Bishop Middleham Quarry SSSI
Disused magnesian limestone quarry managed by Durham Wildlife Trust. The site can be accessed at NZ331326, with parking for up to six cars on the adjacent roadside. The site supports one of the largest colonies of Dingy Skippers in the North-east.

Blackhall Rocks
Part of the Durham Coast SSSI owned by Durham County Council and managed by Durham Wildlife Trust. Dingy Skippers may be found virtually anywhere between Blackhall Rocks and Castle Eden Dene, where Common Bird’s-foot-trefoil grows. Numbers are particularly high on the old spoil heaps of Blackhall Colliery. Parking is at NZ470393.

Wingate Quarry LNR
Disused magnesian limestone quarry owned and managed by Durham County Council. A strong population of Dingy Skippers is present. Car parking is available at NZ372374.

For information on recording packs, workshops, site locations, or any other matter concerning Dingy Skippers, please contact:

Dave Wainwright
Butterfly Conservation, 38 High Street South
Langley Moor, Durham DH7 8JW
Telephone 0870 770 6148
or e-mail dwainwright@butterfly-conservation.org
The Dingy Skipper is a small (average wing span is 29mm), inconspicuous, brown and grey butterfly, most commonly seen basking or engaging in rapid flights difficult to follow with the eye. It is unlikely to be confused with any other butterfly except the Grizzled Skipper, but this species is mainly black and white and rarely seen north of the Midlands. The Dingy Skipper can be mistaken for day-flying moths such as Mother Shipton or Burnet Companion, although the hindwings of both these species are much brighter.

At night and in dull weather Dingy Skippers often roost on flower heads or grasses with their wings ‘folded back’ in a manner similar to many moths. Although they are well camouflaged, at some sites it is possible to count them while they are roosting. The eggs of Dingy Skippers can also be found with practice. These are pale yellow when laid and turn orange after a few days.

What can you do to help us?

Survey and Monitoring
Find out where the butterfly may be found near you. In May and June, you can help to monitor known populations and survey new sites. Join a training workshop to learn more about the butterfly and its habitat needs.

Habitat conservation
Join your local branch of Butterfly Conservation and help with conservation work parties maintaining occupied Dingy Skipper sites or restoring others in the region.

Seek advice
Landowners can follow management guidelines below or contact Butterfly Conservation for further help and information.

How to manage sites for Dingy Skippers.

Farmland
On farmland, the Dingy Skipper largely persists on unimproved grassland. This habitat type is usually of high conservation interest, so landowners may already receive support and advice regarding management. Management regimes supported by agri-environment schemes run by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs should be able to cater for the butterfly’s requirements.

Scrub clearance
On many sites scrub will need to be routinely cleared to prevent breeding patches becoming overgrown and shaded. The bare ground exposed during scrub clearance can provide conditions required both by Common Bird’s-foot-trefoil and egg-laying Dingy Skippers.

Grazing
Grazing regimes that produce a range of sward heights including breeding patches of less than 5cm are most suitable. Rotational or periodic grazing are the best regimes, as they provide a continuous supply of sparse vegetation, but allow development of the required foodplant growth form. Alternatively, grazing concentrated in autumn and winter may be used, but heavy summer grazing should be avoided, as female Dingy Skippers generally avoid laying on grazed foodplants. Cattle, which produce a less uniform sward with more bare ground, are preferable to sheep grazing. Rabbits may create ideal swards, or overgrazing.

Mowing
Rotational mowing in autumn can maintain Dingy Skipper sites, but should only be employed where grazing is impractical. Open conditions can be restored by ground disturbance techniques (e.g. scarification, turf stripping).