The Grizzled Skipper is one of the first small butterflies to emerge each year, with the first adults often seen in mid April. Although its caterpillars feed on a variety of widespread larval food plants (all in the rose family) in a range of different habitats (e.g. brownfield sites such as disused railway lines and disused quarries, woodland rides and clearings and unimproved grassland), this small butterfly seems to be in rapid decline.

Where can you see Grizzled Skipper in the Eastern Region?

**Bedfordshire**
Tottenhoe Knolls. Old quarry and spoils heaps now developed into chalk grassland. Turn off the B489 Dunstable to Tring Road to Tottenhoe and follow signs to nature reserve. OS Explorer 192 grid reference 979220.

**Cambridgeshire**
Woodwalton Meadow. A tiny site next to the main railway track with abundant anthills and spring flowers managed by the Cambridgeshire Wildlife Trust. The reserve is between the railway and the road in Church End, Woodwalton. OS Explorer 227 grid reference 212813.

**Essex**
Langdon Nature Reserve and Visitor Centre. An area of old un-improved meadows and thick hedgerows managed by Essex Wildlife Trust. The site can be found 4 miles east of J29 on the M25 between A127 and A13. Follow brown and white duck signs. Telephone 01268 419103. OS Explorer 175 grid reference 212813.

**Hertfordshire**
Waterford Heath. A large area of abandoned gravel workings. The Pits can be found east of Waterford village next to a minor road after crossing the railway line which is on the A119 1 mile north of Hartford. OS Explorer 194 grid reference 318145 and 314154.

**Norfolk**
Narborough Railway Line. A disused railway embankment with chalk grassland managed by Norfolk Wildlife Trust with assistance from Butterfly Conservation. The site is located on the road between Narborough and Marham about 5 miles from Keswick. Park in the small car park next to the disused railway bridge. OS Explorer 236 grid reference 750118.

Both its national distribution and its population at known monitored sites, show worrying declines over the past few decades. The long-term reduction of 50% in its UK distribution is of considerable conservation concern and it is being considered for inclusion in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

The Grizzled Skipper is a high priority in Butterfly Conservation’s Regional Action Plans for the Eastern Region (including Hertfordshire, Essex, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk). Hertfordshire may have over a dozen sites but only a few were confirmed in 2003. In Bedfordshire there could be up to 30 sites with most of these on disused railway lines, disused quarries or spoil banks, but many of these have not been confirmed for nearly 10 years. In Cambridgeshire there were only 5 known surviving colonies in 2003 including a small meadow, clay pits and woodland sites. There are two sites for the butterfly in Essex and the butterfly has not been recorded in Suffolk since 1979.

In Norfolk there have only been records from 3 sites in 2003 but further recording could confirm its presence at a number of potential sites in the future.

Many of the remaining sites are small and isolated from other colonies and with small numbers of the butterfly on them they remain very vulnerable to extinction. The Grizzled Skipper is one of the most local species in the region and with its early spring emergence, small size and numbers it is often not even noticed. There are however, encouraging signs with new colonies being discovered by conservation minded companies and landowners allowing Butterfly Conservation access to their land.

...and Butterfly Conservation needs your help if we are to save it in the Eastern Region.

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The Grizzled Skipper is a delightful little butterfly which if not resting seems to be frantically darting about on urgent business making it difficult to follow with the eye. Its distinctive black and white chequerboard wing pattern means it is unlikely to be confused with any other butterfly. It could be mistaken for small day-flying moths such as Latticed Heath or Mother Shipton if given a casual glance. Look closely at the wing pattern and antennae which is often feathery in moths. At night or in dull weather they often roost communally on grass or flower heads, although well-camouflaged, with practice this can be a good time to count them at some sites.

How do Grizzled Skippers live?
The adult butterflies normally live in ‘colonies’ (aggregations of adults in discrete habitats), which are typically small, comprising less than 50 individuals. Most adults stay within the colony, but dispersal distances of 1.5km have been recorded, and it is likely that the butterfly can fly much further.

The Grizzled Skipper is usually single brooded and adults emerge between the second and fourth weeks of April depending on how warm the spring has been. At individual sites the butterfly flies for 4-6 weeks and by mid-June the flight season is over at most localities. The majority of eggs are laid singly on the underside of leaves of foodplants, such as Agrimony, Creeping Cinquefoil, Wild Strawberry, Bramble, Birds-foot Trefoil and Bird’s-foot Trefol. Large quantities of spring/early nectar sources such as Daisy, Bugle, Bulbous Buttercup and Bird’s-foot Trefol.

Large (more than 2 hectares) sites containing heads (40+cm high) from the previous year can be of high value providing shelter and to act as focal points for mate-location. Clearings in woodlands are a vital and much compensated for losses by creating new areas.

How to manage sites for Grizzled Skippers.
Woodland and Rides
Clearings in woodlands are a vital and much reduced habitat for many butterflies. For the Grizzled Skipper its special habitat needs may more often be present along forestry tracks, verges or the banks of ditches and rides. The exposed sub-soil or the stone beds of tracks can be the key element in providing the micro-habitat they need. Mosaic conditions are provided in woodland re-growth in the first few years following felling or coppicing or in wide sunny rides which are regularly cut or disturbed.

Grazing
Light, winter grazing by cattle without any grazing in the spring is the preferred management option. Sheep tend to create a uniform short grassland and are less likely to create localised bare ground. Rabbits can create ideal conditions for Grizzled Skipper but their numbers are notoriously difficult to manage and can lead to over-grazing or under-grazing.

Mowing
A rotational mowing regime in September for meadows and woodland rides can maintain sites for Grizzled Skipper but some machines can damage ant hills. It may be beneficial to restore open areas by scarification.

Scrub Clearance
On many sites scrub will need to be routinely cleared to prevent breeding patches becoming overgrown and shaded. The bare ground exposed when scrub is cleared can provide conditions required by Wild Strawberry and other larval foodplants.

There is further detail available on the Species Action Plan available on Butterfly Conservation’s website. www.butterfly-conservation.org

What do Grizzled Skippers Need?
In all habitat types the following vegetation is needed:

An abundance of one or more of the following key larval foodplants: Wild Strawberry, Bramble, Strawberry, Creeping Cinquefoil, Tormentil and Agrimony. Large (more than 2 hectares) sites containing heads (40+cm high) from the previous year can be of high value providing shelter and to act as focal points for mate-location.

Great care is needed when managing sites for the Grizzled Skipper as many sites now have small and isolated populations which will be vulnerable to any large scale management work. Monitoring of Grizzled Skipper populations should be used to help verify the effects of management work. Contact Butterfly Conservation for further assistance.

The objectives will be to create and maintain a mosaic of sward heights and areas of bare ground. Sward heights should range from short (less than 5cm, usually with bare ground) through medium (6-12cm) to tall (more than 13cm) rank grassland associated with scrub of different age structures.

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

Survey and Monitoring
Find out where the butterfly may be found near you. In April, May and early June, help to monitor known populations and survey new sites. Knowing where new habitat can be made available for them near to existing colonies is an important conservation measure. Join a training workshop to learn more about the butterfly and its habitat needs.

How to get involved
Contact Butterfly Conservation for further help and information www.butterfly-conservation.org

Contact Butterfly Conservation and help with conservation measures. Join a training workshop to learn more about the Grizzled Skipper sites or restoring others in the region.