




## Managing for bespoke species/assemblages within Countryside Stewardship – guidance template

Species/assemblage name	Conservation status
<p>Straw Belle (<i>Aspitates gilvaria</i> subsp. <i>gilvaria</i>)</p>  <p>Straw Belle (Mark Parsons/Butterfly Conservation)</p>	<p>Section 41, RDB</p>  <p>Straw Belle habitat (Mark Parsons/Butterfly Conservation)</p>  <p>Straw Belle habitat (Mark Parsons/Butterfly Conservation)</p>

### Introduction

This moth has an annual life cycle. Flies from late July to mid September, but has been found from mid June, and is readily disturbed by day, but also flies at night. It frequents free-draining calcareous grassland on the North Downs, being found at several sites in Kent and probably now confined to just a single site in Surrey.

Sites for Straw Belle can be difficult to characterise but can typically be described as comprising a fairly tall sward (up to 20-30cm using a drop disc), usually at least moderately herb-rich, with grass tussocks, but interspersed with shorter areas and bare ground, and often on moderate to steep, south or south-west facing slopes. The dense tussocks and dry thatch within this habitat are thought to be vital to provide cover for the adult moths. The adult has been observed ovipositing on a dry grass stem. Overwinters as a small larva feeding from September through to May, the larva is thought to feed on a range of herbaceous plants, such as fairy flax, common bird's-foot trefoil, etc. Larvae have been found resting on dead grass stems in or near areas of short (<10cm), broken chalk turf.

### Why a bespoke species/assemblage?

Care is needed for the management of this species and this may need to be undertaken on a pulse basis, i.e. not annually. The species has a requirement for longer turf sites, but with areas of shorter turf and bare ground, and these are vulnerable to overgrazing, but also to scrub invasion if the sites are left unmanaged for too long.

### When and where to apply this guidance

North Downs of Kent and Surrey. Light winter cattle grazing is the preferred management for this species. On larger areas, or where there are adjacent sites, it may be that a compartmental approach can be adopted, although all areas should not be grazed in any one year. Sites can be ungrazed for a few years, but this should be undertaken in association with monitoring of the moth and reviewed on an annual basis. A few steeper sloped sites may be self-sustaining through natural erosion and may only require occasional scrub control.

### Developing a Countryside Stewardship agreement

#### Relevant CS options

GS6	Management of species rich grasslands
GS7	Restoration towards species rich grasslands
SP9	Threatened species supplement

#### Prescription guidance for GS6/GS7

P42 - [Control/Manage] [scrub] [in XXXX] [by cutting and stump treatment] so that [by year [5]] cover [of the [LOCATION] is no more than [5] %]. [Remove all cut material.]

P464 - Maintain the extent of [mosaic grassland and small patches of bare ground] of interest within the [grassland] as identified [XXXX].

P470 - [By year X], [at least 2 moderate/high value indicator species Yarrow, Wild Thyme, Creeping Cinquefoil, Black Medick, Thyme-leaved Speedwell, Wild Parsnip, Common Bird's-foot trefoil and Fairy Flax for Priority habitat feature Lowland Calcareous grassland must be frequent/in flower during May and August and 2 high value indicator species XXXX for Priority habitat feature XXXX occasional (as defined in XXXX (currently the FEP Handbook)). [By year X], cover of [species XXXX must be less than 10% / between 50% and 90%/frequent].

P667 - [From [establishment] and as necessary onwards (which may involve not grazing the site in some years)], manage by [pulse grazing by cattle (never sheep) in winter(or on larger sites, or contiguous sites it maybe that a compartmentalised approach can be adopted so that light cattle grazing at other times of year may be suitable)] [to maintain VEGETATION CONDITIONS] [so that the sward height is between 20-30cm with frequent areas of shorter vegetation (<10cm) and bare earth].

#### IoS for GS6/GS7

[in all years], cover of wildflowers in the sward (excluding undesirable species but including rushes and sedges), should be between [10% and 75% or frequent]. At least [30 to 50%] of wild flowers should be flowering during [May-August].

[in all years], the average sward height [between April-May] should be fairly tall (between 20-30cm), with coarser grass tussocks frequent, interspersed with areas of shorter turf.

[in all years] [Straw Belle] [should be present and maintained] on the site

[By year 3] Cover of bare ground, [including dry crumbly soil and bare rock] must be between [1% and 10%].

### **Prescription guidance for SP9**

Where grazing is not possible, SP9 could be used to support a programme of management aimed at providing a varied sward to include bare ground, tussocky grasses and moderately herb rich. This may require some carefully managed rotational scrub clearance to be laid out in a feasibility study.

### **Monitoring**

Timed counts of the adults can be undertaken. On some sites numbers can be low therefore presence/absence searches should be carried out. Ideally each site should be monitored annually, where this is not possible this should be undertaken every other year. This should be undertaken by a specialist or through trained individuals.

Training can be provided to anyone volunteering to assist with surveys for Straw Belle, for further information please contact Butterfly Conservation.

### **Further information**

A factsheet is available at: [http://butterfly-conservation.org/files/1.straw\\_belle-psf.pdf](http://butterfly-conservation.org/files/1.straw_belle-psf.pdf). See also Waring, P. & Townsend M. 2009. *Field Guide to the Moths of Great Britain and Ireland*. British Wildlife Publishing, Gillingham. (Second edition).

### **Authorship/version control**

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