



Newsletter reporting on work to conserve Lepidoptera on Forestry Commission Land in England.

Foreword

Welcome to the sixth edition of "Speckled Wood", an email newsletter produced by Butterfly Conservation and Forestry Commission England about the conservation work to benefit threatened butterflies and moths on priority sites. In this issue we report on two joint Forestry Commission England and Butterfly Conservation projects benefiting butterflies and moths and other wildlife; a Wood White project in the Clun Valley (West Midlands Forest District) and a project to benefit the High Brown Fritillary on the Morecambe Bay Limestones (North West Forest District). Butterfly Conservation has recently produced a series of new species factsheets which can be downloaded from Butterfly Conservation's website (see page 4 for further details).

Wood White Success In The Clun Valley

Alan Reid, Wildlife Ranger, Forestry Commission England, West Midlands Forest District.
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In 2004 I was offered the opportunity to leave my Forestry Commission wildlife rangers post in Devon and transfer to Shropshire. Many people (especially in Devon) could not understand this move, but being a 'countryman' born and bred in the Midlands, I knew exactly what I was doing.

One of the projects I inherited from the previous forest ranger, was a mowing programme in two woodlands (Bury Ditches and Radnor Wood, Grade A priority sites in the FC/BC Lepidoptera Conservation Strategy) where the Wood White was found in good numbers. At the same time I was introduced to Jenny Joy (Butterfly Conservation's West Midlands Regional Officer), and could not help but be infected by Jenny's enthusiasm.

Six years on and the mowing plan has developed into a 'programme'. Firstly, the mowing now encompasses four woodlands and has a much more in-depth regime. Each year, with support from my forester, I have been able to open out large rideside corridors with the removal and chipping of trees and scrub. In 2007, Sue Clarke and David Green arrived to do a study on the habitats and ecology of the Wood White butterfly in these woods. Unfortunately, if you remember the summer of 2007, to say the weather was against them is an understatement. In 2008 we established a network of volunteer recorders to help with the transect work. Also 2008 found us all on our knees locating and recording eggs, which, I have to say, once you have 'your eye in' is not the daunting task I imagined.

As a result of the success of the mowing and opening up work (in terms of increasing both Wood White numbers and the plant diversity) in 2009 we came up with a much larger scale 'Stepping Stones' project. This was a landscape-scale idea of linking up 12 woodlands (including Blakeridge Wood, Bucknell Wood, Hopton Wood, Purslow Wood and Radnor and Bury Ditches, Grade A priority woodlands in the *Lepidoptera on Forestry Commission Land in England; Conservation Strategy 2007-2017*), all with good historic butterfly records and using the Clun valley woodlands as the epicentre. The topogra-



Management work in progress at Bury Ditches. Photo by Alan Reid/Forestry Commission.



phy, existing hedgerow and valley corridor links between the woodlands, existing ride network within the woodlands were studied, then, using tools such as new ride development, premature clearfell of conifer crop trees and a redesign of the forest road network the 'Stepping Stones' project was produced. Here we are in 2010, a bid to SITA Trust was successful and we are now organising and finalising the plan of action for the next three years.

Here in Shropshire/North Herefordshire the Wood White is doing well, hopefully with the work we are doing and the plans afoot it also has a rosy future? As I have said when giving presentations etc, my hope is that when I come to retirement age I am still having to explain that the slow, floppy, white butterfly is not a cabbage white.



Wood White. Photo by Peter Eeles

Finally, in 2007 we lost 'Bill the butterfly man'. Bill Davidson was a legend in this part of the world, his knowledge and records of the local Lepidoptera unsurpassed. And I have to say that without Bill I would not be writing this today.

The National Wood White Project

The National Wood White project set up in 2007 continued to gain momentum in 2009 with visits to many of the key woodlands undertaken and an action programme agreed. A national recovery plan for the Wood White is currently in preparation and an updated Wood White sites dossier is due for completion in 2010. This dossier clearly identifies the south Shropshire and north Herefordshire areas as being two key national strongholds for the Wood White. The SITA Trust funded Wood White project in south Shropshire will follow on and learn from an ongoing successful SITA Trust project on the Wood White in Herefordshire (an article about the Herefordshire Wood White project can be found in Issue 4 of this newsletter).

Conserving the High Brown Fritillary on the Morecambe Bay Limestones

Dr. Dave Wainwright (North of England Regional Officer, Butterfly Conservation) and James Bickley (Woodland Officer, South Cumbria and North Lancashire, Forestry Commission England).



High Brown Fritillary. Photo by Tim Melling

Forestry Commission England and Butterfly Conservation are working together to help conserve the High Brown Fritillary in the Morecambe Bay Limestones and South Cumbria Low Fells, the UK's national stronghold for this species. The long-term decline of this rare butterfly has coincided with a decrease in management of coppiced woodlands. The butterfly is intolerant of shading; indeed, new clearings only remain suitable for breeding for 2-3 years, therefore continual clearance of new areas is essential if the butterfly is to survive within woodland.

Butterfly Conservation's *Conserving the High Brown Fritillary on the Morecambe Bay Limestones* project, which runs from 2008-2012, has £240k of funding from GrantScape to fund practical conservation work to benefit High Brown Fritillary and other UK Biodiversity Action Plan butterflies across a number of sites in the area.

Some of GrantScape's funding has been spent on managing rides at Whitbarrow and Dalton Craggs (Grade A priority sites in the *Lepidoptera on Forestry Commission Land in England; Conservation Strategy, 2007-2017*); this work has augmented more extensive management undertaken by Forestry Commission England which has involved removal of conifers from these SSSIs. Butterfly Conservation staff are also currently engaged with several partners, including Forestry Commission England, the National Trust and two private landowners who own and manage woodlands on Middlebarrow. The aim is to devise a management plan that incorporates all the woodland areas on this limestone hill which will help to ensure that species such as High Brown Fritillary, Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Duke of Burgundy continue to thrive there.

A very successful partnership between Butterfly Conservation and Forestry Commission England has been developed; Forestry Commission England is now targeting key sites with funding through their Woodland Improvement Grants programme (WIGs). Work at some sites, which was initially scheduled to be funded through the project, is now being funded through Forestry Commission grants, which has provided an opportunity for additional sites to be included in the project and the extent of management has been far greater than initially envisaged. This Forestry Commission support will enable conservation management to continue beyond the end of the project, meaning that advances in conservation work are not lost once funding has expired.

These funds are helping pay for activities such as coppice cutting, bringing coppice coupes back into management, fencing, scrub cutting, deer population control, conifer removal from PAWS, restoration of woodland SSSI. As well as creating new clearings, Butterfly Conservation is widening existing rides, or creating new ones, in order to facilitate movement of butterflies between breeding patches.

However, to ensure the future management of these woods is sustainable and butterfly-friendly, it is imperative that markets for coppice products are identified and exploited. The operations provide wood fuel for local consumers and have enabled at least one wood fuel business to become firmly established. The hope is that as the project continues over the next two years it is able to promote the use of coppice products in the local area, establish a market for them and so guarantee the future sustainable management of the coppice stools. This will provide benefits for both local people and wildlife.

Whilst the project focuses on the High Brown Fritillary it also benefits other BAP priority species such as Pearl-Bordered Fritillary, Small Pearl-Bordered Fritillary, Duke of Burgundy, Northern Brown Argus, Dingy Skipper and Grayling. Of course it is not just butterflies that will profit from this, declining woodland birds for example will also benefit.

Thanks should also go to the other, numerous partners who have helped make this project such a success so far.

For more information about this project please contact Martin Wain (Morecambe Bay Limestones Conservation Officer, Butterfly Conservation, mwain@butterfly-conservation.org).

Forest District Visits

District review meetings will be held in each Forest District at least once throughout the duration of the 10-year Strategy. If you would like to discuss holding a meeting in your district please contact Bernadette Noake or Rachael Edwards (contact details on page 4).

Encouraging volunteers to survey and monitor priority sites

Volunteers play a key role in surveying and monitoring Lepidoptera on Forestry Commission England sites. The data this provides is vital to enable understanding of the changes in Lepidoptera populations and provides a basis for management advice. To encourage further survey work at Forestry Commission England sites, get in touch with the local Butterfly Conservation branch (www.butterfly-conservation.org/bcbranches) and other local volunteers. If Forestry Commission staff request survey work, there may be Forestry Commission funds available to fund volunteer expenses. Members of Butterfly



Halecat Woods: a privately owned site. Image taken before ride widening was carried out as part of a woodland improvement grant. Photo by Dave Wainwright/Butterfly Conservation.



Halecat Woods after ride widening. Since the images were taken, GrantScape funding has been used to increase the amount of breeding habitat by chipping and disposing of all the brush piles. Photo by Dave Wainwright/Butterfly Conservation.

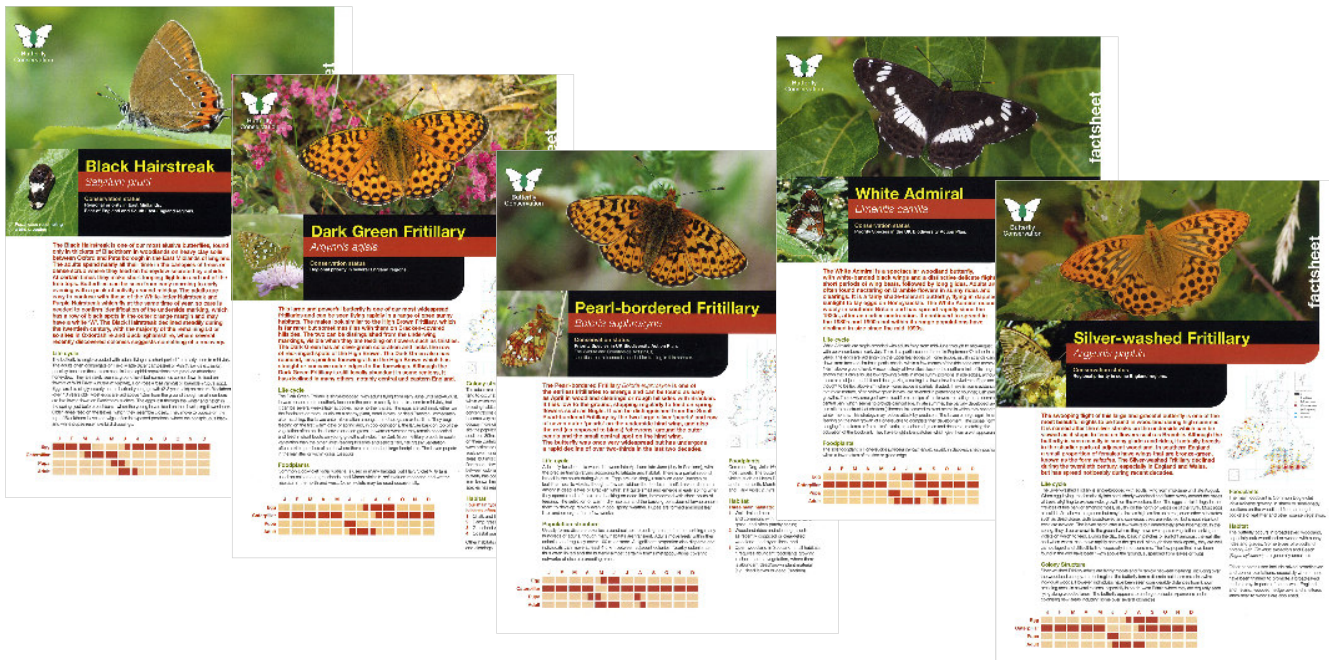
Conservation are covered by Butterfly Conservation's insurance policy to carry out butterfly and moth surveys (in a voluntary role), including light trapping for moths. If you need further help to set up monitoring, help may also be available from Butterfly Conservation staff, so please get in touch with Bernadette Noake (contact details below).

Training Days

Details of training events can be found on Butterfly Conservation's website www.butterfly-conservation.org/events. Please contact us if you are interested in arranging specific events.

New Butterfly Conservation Species Factsheets

Don't forget that Butterfly Conservation has factsheets detailing the ecology of more than 50 different butterflies and moths (the majority of which are UK BAP priority species). Habitat management recommendations are also included. Four new factsheets have been produced recently: Black Hairstreak, Dark Green Fritillary, Silver-washed Fritillary and White Admiral. Additionally, the Pearl-bordered Fritillary factsheet has been updated. **If you would like copies of any of the factsheets please contact Butterfly Conservation, or download them from www.butterfly-conservation.org/priorityspeciesfactsheets.**



Next Issue

If you have any news about butterflies and moths from your district, (new projects, information or management advice) that you would like to appear in this newsletter then please write an article of no more than 400 words and send it and any accompanying photos to Bernadette Noake (bnoake@butterfly-conservation.org) by 1st September 2010 so it can be included in the next newsletter.

Key Contacts

For further information please contact Bernadette Noake at Butterfly Conservation (bnoake@butterfly-conservation.org, 01929 406004) or Rachael Edwards at Forestry Commission England (rachael.edwards@forestry.gsi.gov.uk, 0117 906 6019).