

Brownfields for Butterflies and Business - UK Conference

Opening Address by Dr Martin Warren Chief Executive, Butterfly Conservation

I am delighted to welcome you all here today for the first ever national conference on Brownfields for butterflies and business. My name is Martin Warren, and I have the privilege of being the Chief Executive for the charity Butterfly Conservation, who have organised the conference.

For those of you not familiar with Butterfly Conservation, we are a charity dedicated to saving butterflies, moths and their habitats and have a membership of almost 13,000 members. We also have a thriving network of Branches around the UK, who harness an enormous amount of volunteer effort and local expertise to help implement our conservation programmes.

We believe that the conference is an extremely important step to raise awareness of the importance of Brownfield sites not just for threatened butterflies and moths, which are our own special interest, but also for other invertebrates and biodiversity in general. We are therefore delighted to be running the conference jointly with our colleagues in Buglife who share a strong common interest in this crucial habitat.

Over the last 50 years, the UK has experienced a huge loss of wildlife habitats throughout the countryside and huge areas have been lost to intensive farmland and forestry. The bald fact is that much of our countryside is a very poor place for butterflies and other wildlife, and only a few more generalised species can survive. The remainder of our species have to rely on small patches of habitat that are left within this sea of intensively used land.

With this loss of habitats in the wider countryside, we have become more and more aware of the importance of Brownfield sites as refuges for some of our rarer species as well as being habitats for more widespread species. Such areas include areas such as disused quarries, former mining land, old railway-lines and waste land, all of which can be valuable not just for wildlife, but also to people because they are often near centres of population and provide places for public enjoyment and outdoor recreation.

We are delighted that Brownfields have at least received higher recognition and are recognised as being a priority habitat in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. They are also relevant because of the duty under the NERC Act for Local Authorities to conserve biodiversity

However, we are aware that Brownfield sites are at the sharp end of development pressure and the need to build more homes and businesses to maintain our economy. We therefore hope that local authorities, developers and the aggregates industry will work with us and other wildlife groups to take up this challenge. With some imagination and careful planning we could turn this constraint into an opportunity, to ensure that we develop our land sustainably and accommodate the needs of biodiversity as well as providing vital spaces for people and wildlife within our urban areas. I am aware this might not be easy, but with a will there will undoubtedly be a way.

Our main aims for today are

- 1) To share experience and knowledge of brownfield sites, ranging from the management, restoration and creation of brownfields sites
- 2) To identify best practice, so that best practice can be implemented to help save wildlife wherever possible
- 3) To utilise the expertise and experience of the delegates to highlight some of the biggest challenges to conserving nature on these sites and how to overcome them

I am heartened by the fact that so many people are here today to discuss the issues, representing a wide range of organisations and interests. I am grateful for your time and hope you have an enjoyable as well as productive day.

Before I introduce our first speakers, I would like to say a few thanks.

Firstly to Jane Ellis and Sharon Hearle for their hard work over many months in organising this meeting.

Secondly I would like to say a big thank you to our funders for this work, especially Natural England's Countdown 2010 grant and the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation.

Thirdly, I would like to thank NFU Mutual for hosting this event in their splendid building and for providing us with lunch and refreshments.

I would like now to introduce our first speakers, Jane Ellis and Sharon Hearle who are going to introduce their Midland butterflies and Brownfields projects.