



PRESS RELEASE

Embargoed until Thursday
5th August

Gildernew praises farmers for protecting rare butterfly

During a visit to Fermanagh Show on Wednesday 4th August, Farming Minister Michelle Gildernew MP MLA participated in the launch of an information leaflet about the Marsh Fritillary butterfly.

The beautiful Marsh Fritillary butterfly is a threatened species across Europe. Several large colonies have been discovered in the last few years in Fermanagh and west Tyrone. The charity Butterfly Conservation NI is keen to help land owners protect the butterfly and this has led to the launch of a new information leaflet shedding light on how farmers can protect this stunning species.

The leaflet provides advice to farmers which will help them with identification and management of their land for this rare butterfly and has been produced in partnership by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and Butterfly Conservation

New sites have been discovered by field staff working for both DARD and NIEA who have discovered butterflies and caterpillar webs whilst visiting farms and protected sites throughout Fermanagh and Tyrone. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency has also designated several new sites as Areas of Special Scientific Interest in light of finding substantial colonies of the marsh fritillary present.

Speaking at Fermanagh Show Michelle Gildernew said “I am delighted to launch the leaflet about the beautiful Marsh Fritillary butterfly. It is great to see staff from my Department working closely with farmers, NIEA and Butterfly Conservation. Farmers in this area who are managing species-rich grasslands under agri-environment agreement are truly making a difference by helping to protect this rare species”.

Catherine Bertrand, Senior Regional Officer for the charity said:

“The butterfly needs pastures with abundant ‘Blue button’ (devil’s-bit scabious), upon which the caterpillars feed. Such pastures have disappeared from large parts of Ireland and Britain through agricultural improvement and heavy grazing, but fortunately we still have extensive areas in Fermanagh and west Tyrone. Butterfly Conservation is keen to work with farmers and DARD to show how traditional low-intensity cattle grazing can help the butterfly.”

Dr. Michael Meharg, Head of Biodiversity within the Northern Ireland Environment Agency added “Wildflower meadows are one of NI’s most precious priority habitats, and agri-environment scheme options are available to help farmers continue to manage these superb, flower-rich fields in a traditional, non-intensive way. By doing so, this butterfly and many other species that depend on these meadows will remain here for future generations.”

Dr Martin Warren, Chief Executive of Butterfly Conservation said: “We are very grateful to the Minister for launching our advisory leaflet today. We appreciate her support for our work, and the willingness in both DARD and NIEA to work together with ourselves to support and protect the marsh fritillary. This is a very special part of the world and we hope we can help keep it that way.”

The leaflet was produced by Butterfly Conservation in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of Environment’s NI Environment Agency.

PICTURES

- Minister and other officials at the launch, from left to right
 - Catherine Bertrand, Senior Regional Officer for Butterfly Conservation in Northern Ireland,
 - Michelle Gildernew Minister for Agriculture MP MLA,
 - Martin Warren, Chief Executive Butterfly Conservation
 - Dr Michael Meharg, Head of Biodiversity NIEA
- Leaflet (pdf)
- Marsh Fritillary butterfly, for which Fermanagh & Tyrone could be of European importance. Paul Kirkland
- A Blue Button pasture. Bobbie Hamill

CONTACTS

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

The Marsh Fritillary butterfly is listed as a Priority Species under the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy (NIBS). NIBS forms an integral part of the UK’s commitment to the Convention on Biological Diversity. The butterfly is on the wing in May and June. In August and September the communal caterpillars spin protective webs, easily visible in the blue button meadows. The free leaflet explains the butterfly’s ecology and life cycle, and the management of its habitats. It is available at www.butterfly-conservation.org/northernireland

Butterfly Conservation is the largest insect conservation charity in Europe with nearly 15,000 members in the UK, and over 100 in Northern Ireland. Its aim is the conservation of butterflies, moths and their habitats. It runs conservation programmes on over 60 threatened species of butterfly and moth and manages over 30 nature reserves. Further information www.butterfly-conservation.org

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