



PRESS RELEASE

SCOTTISH BUTTERFLIES BUCK DOWNWARD TREND

Butterflies have fared better in Scotland than in England over the last decade, a major scientific report reveals today.

The State of the UK's Butterflies 2011 report by Butterfly Conservation and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) reveals populations of specialist species have stabilised in Scotland while their UK counterparts have continued to decline.

The total number of common and widespread butterflies in England fell by a quarter in 10 years, indicating underlying problems with the environment, the report reveals.

But, in Scotland, the total abundance of widespread butterflies increased slightly (by 11%) during the same period.

The differences are due to Scotland's relatively unspoilt landscapes which provide essential habitats for butterflies and to the warming climate.

Several species have expanded their range dramatically in Scotland over recent years, including the Speckled Wood, Comma, Peacock, and Orange-tip.

But the picture North of the border is not entirely rosy - some specialist species are still declining, such as the Pearl-bordered Fritillary.

Butterflies are seen as indicator species so these serious declines may represent a wider UK insect biodiversity crisis.

The report represents the first time that a ten-year assessment of both species distribution and population changes has been possible for UK Butterflies.

One of Scotland's most important species, the Marsh Fritillary is doing well.

Although it had previously been lost from large parts of Scotland, its decline has reversed in recent years and it has expanded from its strongholds in Argyll.

Intensive work by Butterfly Conservation and its partners has helped farmers enter 3000 hectares of Marsh Fritillary habitat into wildlife-friendly grant schemes to ensure suitable management for the butterfly.

But there are now concerns about the continued funding of these schemes.

Dr Martin Warren, Chief Executive of Butterfly Conservation, said: "We now have firm evidence that targeted effort can reverse the decline of threatened butterflies, so it is especially sad that these hard-fought gains have been put in jeopardy due to Government cut backs in funding.

"Wildlife recovery needs more not less funding if we are to halt the loss of biodiversity and create a healthy environment for us all to live in."

Butterfly Conservation Surveys Manager Richard Fox said: "Butterflies are the 'canaries in the coalmine' for our environment and the overall UK assessment shows they are in a poor state in 21st Century Britain.

"However, we know what to do to reverse the long-term declines of many threatened butterflies and, over the last decade, we've proved it can be done on countless local sites across the UK.

"What we now need to do is roll out these successful approaches on a bigger scale. It is vital that the Government's new approach to ecosystem conservation retains a sharp focus on threatened species – without this, many butterflies and other wildlife will continue to decline."

Dr Marc Botham, Butterfly Ecologist for CEH, said: "This detailed 10-year assessment of butterfly trends over the UK is only made possible by an army of volunteers. This new assessment highlights the huge contribution thousands of volunteer recorders make to long-term butterfly monitoring schemes.

"Without the dedication of these recorders it would be impossible to produce accurate and detailed assessments of how the UK's butterflies are being affected by environmental change."

The report comes from data gathered by two long-running citizen science projects - the Butterflies for the New Millennium recording scheme and the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme.

CONTACTS

For interview requests and images contact the Butterfly Conservation Press Office on 01929 406005 news@butterfly-conservation.org

NOTES

Butterfly Conservation is the largest charity of its type in the world. Our aim is the conservation of butterflies, moths and their habitats. We run conservation programmes for more than 100 threatened species and manage over 30 nature reserves.

www.butterfly-conservation.org