



**Species Action Plan**

**ADONIS BLUE**  
*Lysandra bellargus*  
(*Polyommatus bellargus*)

**1998**

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**THIS PROJECT IS SUPPORTED BY**



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**Butterfly Conservation** (the British Butterfly Conservation Society) has an overriding objective to ensure a future for butterflies, moths and their habitats. In order to achieve this objective its aims are to:

- raise public awareness of the plight of our butterflies and moths and encourage public involvement in conservation.
- halt the decline of butterflies and moths and maintain or improve the present status of threatened species.
- improve the extent and suitability of key lepidoptera habitats and the environmental quality of the countryside as a whole for all lepidoptera species.
- work with and advise other conservation groups, local bodies and agencies on techniques of land management which favour butterflies and moths and related wildlife.
- acquire and manage habitats for butterflies and moths.
- encourage the research (both at amateur and professional levels) on butterflies and moths.
- support and encourage butterfly and moth conservation world-wide.

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## Summary

- The Adonis Blue is restricted to chalk and limestone grassland in southern England but has declined in number by over 90% mainly since 1950. During the 1980's and 1990's there has been a partial recovery in some areas associated with the recovery of rabbit populations from myxomatosis and increased stock grazing. The Adonis Blue is listed under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act for sale only, and is listed as a priority species in the UK Governments Biodiversity Steering Group report.
- Although the current rate of recovery of colonies in southern England is estimated at 25% per decade (during the 1980s), the species remains far less widespread than it was in 1950. Also, the recovery has been limited to the core areas of its former range and the species remains vulnerable to local extinctions elsewhere. The national distribution map is now very much out of date and identification of core areas is required urgently to target conservation action for the species. A **medium** priority is afforded to the conservation action in this plan to protect and increase the number of Adonis Blue colonies in the UK. We will be reviewing this priority when more accurate distribution data are available or should the partial recovery not be maintained.
- The Adonis Blue breeds only on south facing, sheltered, calcicolous grassland with a short-grazed turf (usually less than 5cm). Its larval foodplant is *Hippocrepis comosa*, Horseshoe Vetch, but females select only those plants growing in very short, sheltered locations, often with bare ground present. These conditions create the warm microclimate necessary for a species at the most north westerly edge of its European range.
- The main threat to the Adonis Blue, because of its dependence on short vegetation, is changes in grazing intensity. Its distribution could be reduced rapidly if rabbit populations decline or grazing by livestock is reduced. Its recovery is also hindered by the current fragmentation and isolation of its calcareous grassland habitat, combined with the butterfly's low dispersal rate. Further loss of unimproved grassland through drainage, agricultural improvement and abandonment and scrub encroachment threatens some sites.
- The immediate major objectives of the plan are to maintain viable networks of populations throughout its current range; to ensure the partial recovery of the Adonis Blue in the UK continues; and to. A long term objective of the plan is to restore its 1950 range.
- The objectives of the plan will be achieved by determining the current core areas of distribution of the butterfly; improving and disseminating information on the habitat requirements of the species; ensuring suitable grazing regimes are maintained or restored in priority areas and conducting research on the distribution and ecology of the species to enable its effective conservation.
- The Action Plan covers the next 5 - 10 years, will be monitored annually and reviewed as the situation demands. The priority and nature of any conservation action should be reviewed in the light of these results.

## **Part 1 Overview**

### **1.1 PRIORITY STATEMENT**

The Adonis Blue was once widespread, but always locally distributed, on most chalk and limestone grassland habitat in southern England. It declined severely following the reduction in stock grazing on downland and by the decline in rabbit populations following myxomatosis in the 1950s, but has made a partial recovery since the 1980s. It is a priority species in Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report (DOE, 1995). Based on our current knowledge that the butterfly is increasing in some areas, **medium** priority should be afforded to conservation action to protect and increase the number of the Adonis Blues colonies in the UK.

### **1.2 BROAD OBJECTIVES**

1. Maintain viable networks of populations throughout its current range.
2. Encourage heavy grazing regimes on appropriate downland and ensure partial recovery continues.
3. Long term objective to restore its 1950 range.

### **1.3 LEGAL STATUS**

The butterfly is listed on Schedule 5 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (for sale only\*).

\*It is a criminal offence to sell, offer or expose for sale, or possess or transport for the purposes of sale, whether alive or dead, any wild specimen and parts or derivatives of them; or for anyone to publish or cause to be published any advertisement indicating or suggesting that they buy or sell such things.

<b>Population</b>	<b>-size</b>	<b>The approximate size of many important populations in southern England were assessed in the mid 1980s by Warren (1993a). All known populations in south Dorset were assessed in 1997 by Pearman, et al. (1998).</b>
	<b>-trend, numbers</b>	<b>Total number of colonies was estimated in 1982 to be between 70-80, an estimated 90% reduction in the number of colonies (Thomas, 1983). The recent recovery is less well documented, but it is believed there are approximately 250 colonies today. Populations are currently monitored on approximately 35 transects.</b>
	<b>-trend, range</b>	<b>A significant reduction, particularly in the north of its former range</b>
<b>Knowledge of</b>	<b>-status</b>	<b>No up-to-date national data are available for this species (most recent national survey undertaken in the late 1970s). Location of large and medium colonies needs to be identified.</b>
	<b>-trends</b>	<b>Historical review in GB estimates a rate of decline, in range, of over 42% in 25 years (Warren <i>et al</i>, 1997). Recent review of important sites in central-southern Britain (Warren 1993a) found the rate of extinction to be 25% per decade, however in the last 20 years a recovery at a rate of 25% per decade has taken place in its core areas of Dorset Wiltshire (Thomas 1998, Pearman et al. 1998).</b>
<b>and</b>	<b>-conservation requirements</b>	<b>Good ecological knowledge of its requirements including practical management.</b>

## Part 2 Biological Assessment

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The Adonis Blue *Lysandra bellargus* is at the north western limit of its range in England, where it is confined to the southern counties of Dorset, Wiltshire, Kent, Sussex, Surrey, the Isle of Wight and one site in the Chilterns. Almost half the colonies occur in Dorset, with significant proportions in Wiltshire, Sussex and the Isle of Wight. The butterfly occurs on south facing chalk and limestone downs and coastal cliff tops where its foodplant, Horseshoe Vetch, *Hippocrepis comosa* grows in short vegetation.

### 2.2 ECOLOGY

The Adonis Blue is bivoltine, with adults usually flying from mid May to mid June and early August to mid September. Adults fly only in sunshine and marking studies have shown them to be very sedentary, with very little movement between adjacent colonies (Thomas, 1983a,b). They are not specific in their choice of nectar source, generally utilising the commonest flowers present. In contrast, females are very particular when selecting egg laying sites. Eggs are laid solely on Horse-shoe Vetch growing in short vegetation, typically 1-4 cm, moreover, in a survey in 1978 former sites whose sward had grown above a mean height of 5cm had all lost their colonies. It also has a strong preference for very sheltered south-facing hollows, especially old chalk/lime pits and quarries. This sheltered, short sward is required because it provides a very warm microclimate for larval development and because it is favoured by ants which have a strong mutualism with both the larvae and pupae (Thomas, 1983a,b; Heath *et al.* 1984; see below). Although Adonis Blue requires short turf, it is possible to graze sites too heavily for the species, especially if all nectar sources are eliminated by heavy summer grazing (either by stock or rabbits). The species may also be quite susceptible to drought because the foodplants on south facing slopes are likely to wilt first. Numbers of Adonis Blue were badly hit by extreme drought in 1976 when its foodplant wilted badly on its remaining sites (Thomas, 1983b). The ecology of the foodplant is little known, but this response to drought means that the foodplant's suitability to the Adonis Blue is variable from year to year.

Males are very conspicuous, flying close to the ground searching for freshly emerged virgin females. The females, after pairing, spend long periods resting on the ground in sheltered hollows and depressions whilst their eggs develop. They then fly low to the ground, dropping to crawl over the foodplant. The egg is laid singly, but plants will often have several eggs laid on them by different individuals. As many as 40 eggs have been recorded on a plant (Thomas and Lewington, 1991). The white eggs are laid mainly on the underside of terminal leaflets of small-leaved foodplants in very short swards.

The eggs hatch after 10-15 days and the larvae feed on the lower surface of the leaflets leaving the upper cuticle intact, giving characteristic feeding damage consisting of pale, circular discs on the leaves. As the larvae grow they start to feed on whole leaves, stems and fruits of the foodplant. Larvae can be found in the field, often surrounded by ants which actively milk the larvae for the solution of sugars and amino acids produced from special glands. Similar associations with ants occur in many species of Lycaenids, but the

relationship is particularly strong in the Adonis Blue. Any species of ant appears suitable but, on the southern chalk of England, the two species most commonly observed are *Myrmica sabuleti* and *Lasius alienus*. The ants attend the larvae twenty four hours a day often burying the larvae in a pile of loose earth in the evening to protect them during the night. These 'cells' can often contain up to eight larvae with up to 12 ants in attendance. The ants protect the larvae from predators and parasitoids and may be essential to ensure high rates of survival in populations.

The pupa of the Adonis Blue is difficult to find but has also been seen attended by ants in the warm upper chambers of the ant nest. The pupal stage lasts for approximately three weeks before emergence as an adult.

## 2.3 DISTRIBUTION AND POPULATION

### Distribution

The Adonis Blue has a western palearctic distribution occurring through central and eastern Europe to Russia. It has its southernmost limit in Spain and Portugal and is absent from Ireland, southern Italy, southern Greece, the Mediterranean islands and Fennoscandia. It is declining in most north European countries, with declines greater than 50% over the last 25 years in Belgium, the Czech Republic, Luxembourg and Poland with rates of decline almost as high (between 25- 50%) in Germany, Slovakia and the UK (Swaay et al., 1997).

In Britain, the butterfly has always been restricted to the southern chalk and limestone in England, but underwent a rapid decline in the 1950s to 1970s. Its overall decline has been estimated at 90% by Buxton and Connolly (1973) who surveyed 96 sites throughout most of its former range and found only 14 sites with colonies, most of which were in Dorset. A comprehensive survey in 1978 of Dorset and the immediate vicinity found 32 extant sites out of a former 106, a decline of 70% (Thomas, 1983a). A review of important butterfly sites in central-southern Britain found that the rate of population extinction was high at 25% per decade, although this was calculated for the main period of decline. Moreover the extinction rate was as high on protected sites as on unprotected sites (Warren, 1992).

The causes of decline are partly due to loss of downland habitat to agricultural improvement and partly due to the reduction of grazing pressure on marginal hill land during the 1950s and 1960s. The butterfly was also badly affected by myxomatosis which reduced rabbit numbers, thereby eliminating the only other grazing animal that created suitable short turf.

During the 1980s and 1990s its range has recovered in some areas but it is still extinct in the north of its historical range in Buckinghamshire (1980s), Bedfordshire (aprox. 1960), Hertfordshire (aprox. 1960) and Gloucestershire (1963). Early extinctions occurred in Cambridgeshire & Essex (early 1800s), and Suffolk (1850s), while introductions in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire make it difficult to ascertain its true historical status in these counties (Sawford, 1987). Recent county atlases show that the butterfly is still vulnerable in the north of its range (e.g. Berkshire & Oxfordshire, (Asher, 1994)), but it has re-colonised many areas in the southern stronghold of its range where source colonies survived e.g. in Dorset, (Thomas, 1998; Pearman et al. 1998) and in Wiltshire (Fuller, 1994). This pattern is also shown on National Trust properties where the Adonis Blue has been lost from some sites

but has re-colonised eight others (Oates, 1995). The national distribution map (see Appendix 1) is now out of date, both because of its recent partial recovery within core areas and because of continuing declines at the edge of the species range in Britain.

Data from recent county surveys indicate that there may now be circa 250 colonies (table 1), compared to an estimated 70-80 colonies in 1981 (Thomas, 1983a,b). Most of this recovery has been in the traditional strongholds of Dorset and Wiltshire where colonies were still present, providing a source of individuals for the re-colonisation of sites as they became suitable.

The Adonis Blue's resurgence in the 1980s and 1990s is linked both to the increase in stock grazing on downland, often carried out for conservation reasons, and encouraged by positive payments under the various agri-environment schemes such as ESA or Countryside Stewardship, and the recovery of rabbit populations as myxomatosis has become less virulent.

**Table 1 Approximate status of Adonis Blue in the 1990s**

County	Number of tetrads	No of colonies	Source
Dorset (inc. Greater Purbeck)	78 (30)	c.100 (41)	J. A. Thomas, unpublished, & (Pearman et al., 1998)
Wiltshire	91	90	Fuller, 1995
Kent	20 (14)		Philp, 1993; (Ferguson, 1996)
Sussex	54	c.40	Gay & Gay, 1994
Surrey	10	6 (1 core site)	Collins, 1995; (Jeffcoate, 1996)
Hampshire	2	(1 colony on Dorset border)	(Anon, 1994)
Isle of Wight	14	c10	Anon, 1994
Oxfordshire	3	1?	Asher, 1994
Berkshire	2		Asher, 1994
Gloucestershire	Extinct	2- Reintroduced in 1990, both extinct 1995. (2 unofficial introductions in 1995/6)	Barker, 1991; Meredith, 1994; Joy, 1997.
Somerset	Extinct	1- Reintroduced in 1988, extinct 1994. (+1 unofficial introduction in 1997)	Brown et al. 1995; (R. Sutton, pers. comm.).
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>274</b>	<b>c.250</b>	

## Population

In a classic work, J. A. Thomas and his co-workers undertook detailed autecological research on the Adonis Blue between 1976 - 1980 (Thomas, 1983a,b, 1984a,b, 1990, 1991). The work demonstrated that the Adonis Blue was a colonial, highly sedentary species with no adult

movement detected between sites separated by small barriers, such as scrub, also movements within sites were rarely above 250 metres for both sexes.

Populations were generally small, with no colony having a peak adult population greater than 1,600 in 1978. However, the Adonis Blue is known to fluctuate widely in numbers between years and generations, (with for example one colony increasing from less than 50 to about 60,000 adults between 1977 and 1982), usually in response to changes in the level of grazing (Heath et al, 1984; Thomas, 1983a). For this reason it is difficult to define large, medium and small colony sizes that are valid between years, although this may be useful for comparative terms within a single year. Expansion and contraction of populations to and from sites near to the main area for the species may be linked to high populations in very good years. The recent changing distribution of the Adonis Blue is analogous to another short turf species, the Silver-spotted Skipper, *Hesperia comma*, which was reduced to a small number of refuge sites in the 1960s and 1970s from which it has since expanded (C. D. Thomas & Jones, 1993). The Adonis Blue also contracted to refuge sites where suitable habitat management was maintained, and its recent expansion (colonising nearby, larger areas of suitable habitat first) suggests a similar type of metapopulation\* structure (Pearman, et al., 1998).

## **2.4 LIMITING FACTORS**

### **Historical**

Wholesale destruction of chalk grassland by agricultural improvement.

Lack of grazing and abandonment of calcicolous grassland caused by a decline in stock grazing and reduction of rabbit populations following myxomatosis.

### **Current and Future Limiting Factors**

Further loss of unimproved grassland through drainage, agricultural improvement and afforestation.

Population levels are strongly affected by grazing pressure and may be reduced rapidly if grazing levels are reduced even slightly. Thus the recent improvement in the Adonis Blues status could be reversed rapidly if there was a decline in rabbit populations or a reduction in stock grazing. (While it appears that Rabbit Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (VHD) is unlikely to cause the sorts of decline in wild Rabbit numbers caused by myxomatosis a significant decline due to a combination of other factors is possible. In that case, the current lack of stock grazing in many existing habitats could lead to rapid habitat deterioration and possibly local extinction. It is inappropriate to rely wholly on rabbit grazing at Adonis Blue sites.)

Increasing fragmentation and isolation of sites.

Difficulties in maintaining networks of suitably managed habitats under different conservation ownership.

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\* A metapopulation is a collection of local populations, connected by occasional dispersal, in which there are local extinctions and colonisations (Gilpin & Hanski, 1991).

Climate change/increasing frequency of droughts could change the distribution of suitable habitats and could lead to declines unless the species is able to exploit this, (for example by shifting onto neighbouring flatter ground, or thicker soils, or less south facing slopes that contain the foodplant. However, these are often unavailable near existing breeding sites).

Intrinsic low dispersal ability of Adonis Blue will restrict recovery, especially in highly fragmented habitats that remain outside core areas of Dorset and Wiltshire.

## **2.5 RESUME OF CONSERVATION TO DATE**

### **Ecology, Conservation Requirements and Monitoring**

The autecology of the Adonis Blue has been well studied (Thomas, 1983a,b) leading to positive management aimed at this species on many reserves and other protected sites. The importance of correct habitat management has been identified as the main priority for the butterfly's conservation (Thomas, 1983a; BUTT, 1986). It is now clear that management needs to produce short vegetation for this species and this is best achieved by stock and rabbit grazing (see appendix 2 for summary).

The Adonis Blue is well represented on protected areas, with many of its downland sites being designated SSSI, although it is poorly represented on NNRs (present on only 3 in 1980, this figure is now 7 due to its recent partial recovery), it is present on several WT reserves but no RSPB reserves (McLean et al., 1995). In 1995 there were 36 distinct populations on National Trust land (Oates, 1995).

A re-introduction was attempted in Somerset in 1988 and two in the Cotswolds in 1990/91, the latter as part of a WWF funded project by the West Midlands Branch of Butterfly Conservation. All these attempts have subsequently failed, and the longest surviving reintroduction, in the Chilterns in 1927 survived until changes of grazing in the early 1950s. Of the more recent introductions, none have survived more than 8 years. This includes a well documented introduction to Old Winchester Hill NNR in 1981, where the population built up to a peak of c.5000 adults in 1984, only to dwindle to extinction during the poor summers of 1985-88 (Oates & Warren, 1990).

In 1996, 15 transects on Adonis Blue colonies were covered by the Butterfly Monitoring Scheme but only three have long term data (over 8 years) and seven sites have annual indexes calculated (Pollard and Greatorex-Davies, 1997). In addition to these schemes Butterfly Conservation branch volunteers walk approximately 69 transects on chalk downland of which about 20 have Adonis Blue present (G. Herbert, pers. comm.; J. Tubb, pers. comm. and see also the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Butterfly and Moth Reports 1988-97, and Surrey Branch Annual Butterfly Reports, 1995-7).

### **Current Studies**

Little research is currently being undertaken on the Adonis Blue. In 1997, a comprehensive re-survey was conducted by Butterfly Conservation of former sites in south-east Dorset. This

identified 41 colonies of which 18 were not present in 1978, highlighting that many former sites have been re-colonised in this region since the late 1970s (Pearman et. al., 1998).

The important message that is emerging from current research on the Adonis Blue and other species of butterfly is that their habitats are dynamic. In the longer term, potential habitats for the butterfly may be as important as existing habitats since populations of the butterfly may have to move location in the future due to such factors as climate change and drought.

### Part 3 Actions and Work Programme

*This section has been divided into the standard headings Policy and Legislative; Site Safeguard and Acquisition; Land Management; Species Protection and Licensing; Advisory; International; Future Research and Monitoring; Communications and Publicity; Review. Actions are given a low, medium or high priority. The lead organisation(s) concerned for each action is/are named.*

Definition of Colony Size: Large = >800 adults; medium = 100-800 adults; small = <100. (Numbers fluctuate from year to year, and between first and second generations such that these definitions are only useful as comparative terms within a single year).  
For key to abbreviations see page 16.

#### 3.1 POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE

**Lead  
organisation(s)  
concerned**

##### **Action 1 PRIORITY: HIGH**

Include habitat requirements of the Adonis Blue when drawing up or revising management prescriptions in ESAs and other agri-environment schemes (e.g. Countryside Stewardship, Reserves Enhancement Scheme etc.) covering existing or potential habitats.

**MAFF, FRCA,  
EN.**

#### 3.2 SITE SAFEGUARD AND ACQUISITION

##### **Action 2 PRIORITY: HIGH**

Protect all extant sites and large potential habitats in post 1940 range through management agreements; and reserve acquisition where management agreements fail.

**All**

##### **Action 3 PRIORITY: HIGH**

Oppose any development proposals threatening Adonis Blue sites.

**EN, BC, WT's,  
LA's, NT.**

### **3.3 LAND MANAGEMENT**

#### **Action 4 PRIORITY: HIGH**

Promote beneficial grassland management in areas where the Adonis Blue exists, concentrating on strategic metapopulations which include some large populations or extensive networks of habitats. **All**

#### **Action 5 PRIORITY: MEDIUM**

Restore habitats of realistic potential for re-establishing viable populations within former range, by scrub removal and reinstatement of appropriate grazing regimes, concentrating on areas within 10-20 km of existing populations. **All**

#### **Action 6 PRIORITY: HIGH**

Incorporate needs for the Adonis Blue in management plans/ site management statements on all SSSIs with colonies. **EN**

#### **Action 7 PRIORITY: HIGH**

Integrate management of Adonis Blue sites with the needs of other calcicolous grassland species, especially warmth-loving fauna and flora characteristic of short sparse turf, and develop overall Biodiversity Action Plans for this biotope at national and local levels. **EN, LA's, WT's, BC etc.**

### **3.4 SPECIES PROTECTION AND LICENSING**

#### **Action 8 PRIORITY: LOW**

Conduct strategic reintroductions into extensive areas of restored habitats, but only if natural colonisation is improbable, and long term viability is likely. **BC, EN**

### **3.5 ADVISORY**

#### **Action 9 PRIORITY: HIGH**

Advise conservation agencies, project officers of the relevant agri-environment schemes and site owner/managers on practical habitat management for the Adonis Blue and how to incorporate this with other management priorities and interests. **EN, BC, ITE**

**Action 10 PRIORITY: MEDIUM**

Advise on habitat restoration techniques on potential and former sites. **ITE, BC**

**Action 11 PRIORITY: MEDIUM**

Produce a brief, practical guide on habitat management for the Adonis Blue and other Downland species. **BC, ITE, EN.**

**3.6 INTERNATIONAL**

No action proposed

**3.7 FUTURE RESEARCH, SURVEY AND MONITORING**

**Action 12 PRIORITY: HIGH**

Collate all records and update national distribution map. **BC, ITE, JNCC**

**Action 13 PRIORITY: MEDIUM**

Collate transect data annually from all monitored sites and calculate annual index to compare trends on individual sites. **ITE, BC**

**Action 14 PRIORITY: MEDIUM**

Conduct further research on habitat requirements, ecology and appropriate management regimes on chalk and limestone downland. **EN, BC, ITE.**

**Action 15 PRIORITY: HIGH**

Identify the location of all large and medium colonies and survey potentially suitable, unoccupied habitats within 10-20 km of existing populations in order to target conservation effort. **All**

**3.8 COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY**

**Action 16 PRIORITY: HIGH**

Publicise this Action Plan, the status of the Adonis Blue and measures needed to conserve it. **All**

**Action 17 PRIORITY: HIGH**

Ensure that the Lowland Calcareous Grasslands HAP Group are aware of this plan and any subsequent action to conserve the Adonis Blue. **EN, BC**

**Action 18 PRIORITY: HIGH**

Ensure that all relevant local Biodiversity Action Plans are aware of and refer to this national action plan where appropriate. **All**

**3.9 REVIEW**

**Action 19 PRIORITY: HIGH**

Review this Action Plan annually and update when necessary. **EN, BC**

**Key to abbreviations**

All = All organisations listed  
BC = Butterfly Conservation  
EN = English Nature  
FRCA = Farming and Rural Conservation Agency  
ITE = Institute of Terrestrial Ecology  
JNCC = Joint Nature Conservation Committee  
LAs = Local Authorities  
MAFF = Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries  
NT = National Trust  
WT's = The Wildlife Trusts

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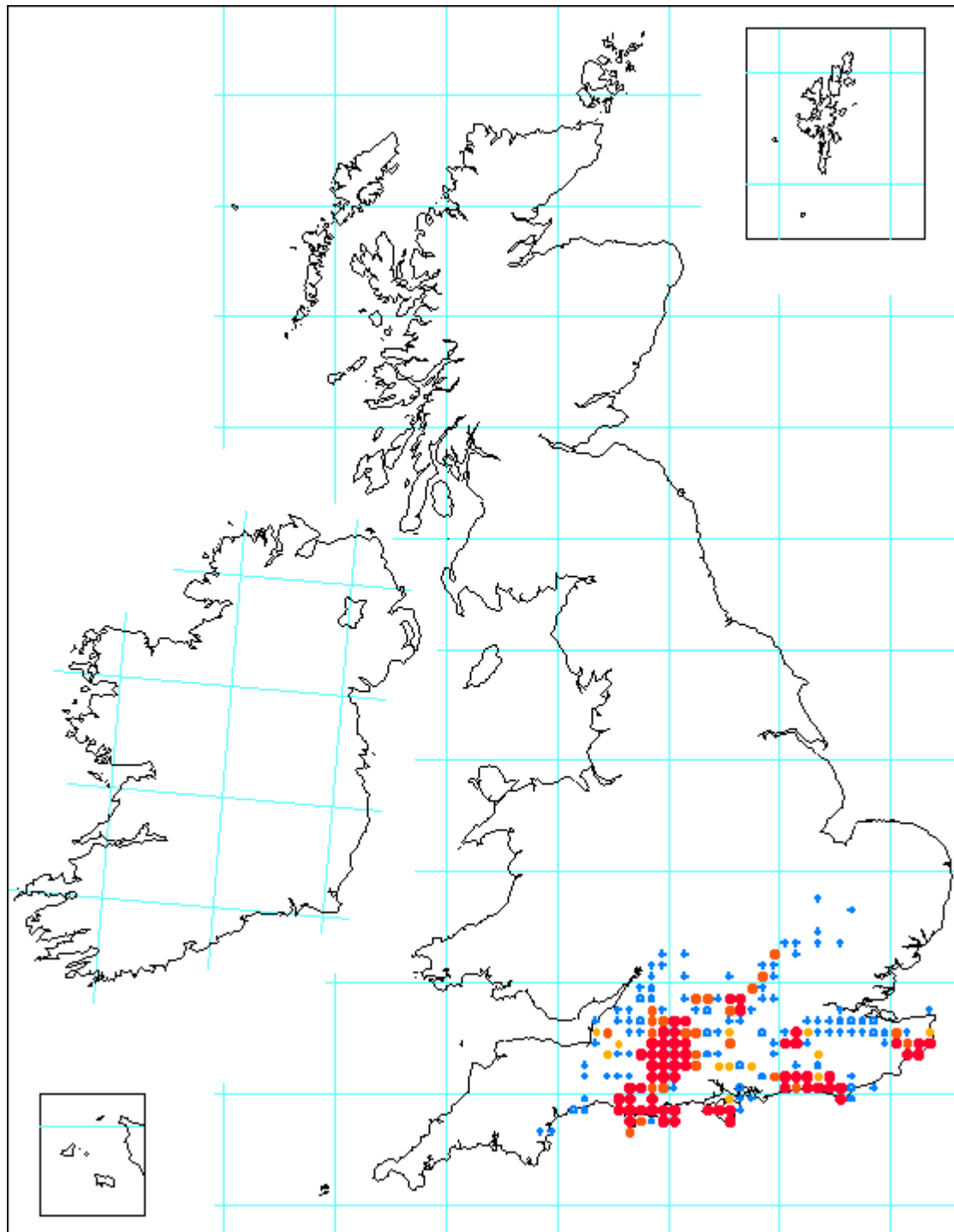
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**Appendix 1 The distribution of the Adonis Blue**

Butterflies for the New Millennium project (2001). Copyright of Butterfly Conservation/Biological Records Centre.

(Dark full spot all records from 1995-1999; open circles all records between 1970-1982; cross all pre 1970 records).



## **Appendix 2 Conservation requirements of the Adonis Blue**

### **Habitat**

The Adonis Blue occurs on south facing, sheltered, calcareous grassland with a very short turf (usually less than 5cm). Its larval foodplant is Horseshoe Vetch, *Hippocrepis comosa*, but females select plants growing in very short, sheltered locations, often with small patches of bare ground present. Abandoned sheltered chalk pits are especially favoured. These conditions create the warm microclimate necessary for the eggs and larvae to develop satisfactorily in the British climate.

### **Management**

Suitable conditions are created by grazing sites heavily either by cattle, ponies, sheep or rabbits. However, contrary to popular belief it is possible to over graze on Adonis Blue sites, particularly in years when the growing season is poor, such as in years of drought. The ideal grazing regime should maintain abundant areas of turf in the height range of 1-5cm for most of the year, but allowing plants to flower in abundance.

The largest colonies occur under continuous grazing or winter and early spring grazing to ensure a short sward when the female is flying in May and June. Smaller colonies can coexist with a wide range of other butterfly species so long as reasonable patches (0.5-1 ha) are always suitably short. This can be done through rotational grazing of compartments or by maintaining small patches of suitable turf among taller growth by continuous grazing. Winter grazing alone is usually enough to maintain a small to medium colony in most years if rabbits are also present, but some summer grazing is desirable.

Some sites require less heavy grazing than others because they possess steep slopes with skeletal soils. Occasionally, as in road cuttings, old quarries and cliffs, no management is necessary, owing to the soil-less terrain. However, conditions may still gradually deteriorate unless there is constant erosion or soil slippage. Some management may therefore still be needed in the longer term, for example by occasional scraping of patches back to bare rock or very thin soils.