



**Butterfly Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and their habitats

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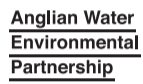
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Butterfly Conservation

**grizzled skippers**  
need our help...

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...and Butterfly Conservation needs your help if we are to **save it** in the Eastern Region



Tormentil Wild Strawberry

# a declining butterfly

The Grizzled Skipper is one of the first small butterflies to emerge each year, with the first adults often seen in mid April. Although its caterpillars feed on a variety of widespread larval food plants (all in the rose family) in a range of different habitats (e.g. brownfield sites such as disused railway lines and disused quarries, woodland rides and clearings and unimproved grassland), this small butterfly seems to be in rapid decline.



Pair of Grizzled Skippers

## Where can you see Grizzled Skipper in the Eastern Region?

**Bedfordshire**

**Tottenhoe Knolls.** Old quarry and spoils heaps now developed into chalk grassland. Turn off the B489 Dunstable to Tring Road to Tottenhoe and follow signs to nature reserve. OS Explorer 192 grid reference 979220.

**Cambridgeshire**

**Woodwalton Meadow.** A tiny site next to the main railway track with abundant anthills and spring flowers managed by the Cambridgeshire Wildlife Trust. The reserve is between the railway and the road in Church End, Woodwalton. OS Explorer 227 grid reference 212813.

**Essex**

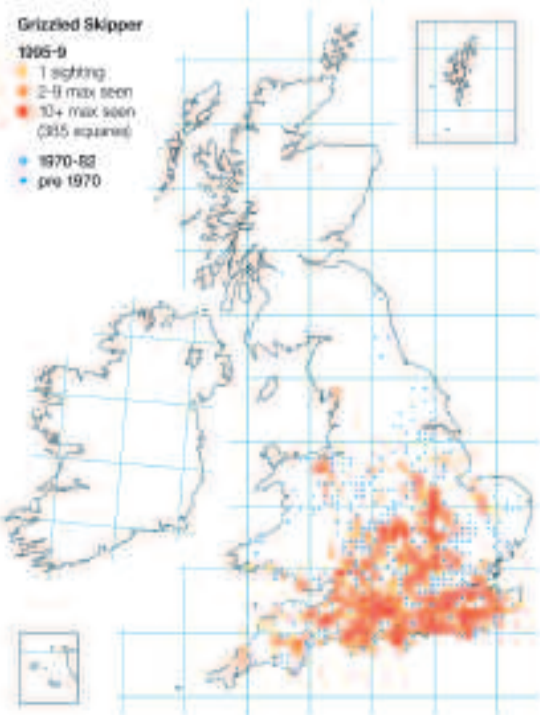
**Langdon Nature Reserve and Visitor Centre.** An area of old un-improved meadows and thick hedgerows managed by Essex Wildlife Trust. The site can be found 4 miles east of J29 on the M25 between A127 and A13. Follow brown and white duck signs. Telephone 01268 419103. OS Explorer 175 grid reference 660874

**Hertfordshire**

**Waterford Heath.** A large area of abandoned gravel workings. The Pits can be found east of Waterford village next to a minor road after crossing the railway line which is on the A119 1 mile north of Hertford. OS Explorer 194 grid reference 318145 and 314154.

**Norfolk**

**Narborough Railway Line.** A disused railway embankment with chalk grassland managed by Norfolk Wildlife Trust with assistance from Butterfly Conservation. The site is located on the road between Narborough and Marham about 5 miles from Swaffham. Park in the small car park next to the disused railway bridge. OS Explorer 236 grid reference 750118.



Both its national distribution and its population at known monitored sites, show worrying declines over the past few decades. The long-term reduction of 50% in its UK distribution is of considerable conservation concern and it is being considered for inclusion in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

The Grizzled Skipper is a high priority in Butterfly Conservation's Regional Action Plans for the Eastern Region (including Hertfordshire, Essex, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk). Hertfordshire may have over a dozen sites but only a few were confirmed in 2003. In Bedfordshire there could be up to 30 sites with most of these on disused railway lines, disused quarries or spoil banks, but many of these have not been confirmed for nearly 10 years. In Cambridgeshire there were only 5 known surviving colonies in 2003 including a small meadow, clay pits and woodland sites. There are two sites for the butterfly in Essex and the butterfly has not been recorded in Suffolk since 1979.

In Norfolk there have only been records from 3 sites in 2003 but further recording could confirm its presence at a number of potential sites in the future.

Many of the remaining sites are small and isolated from other colonies and with small numbers of the butterfly on them they remain very vulnerable to extinction. The Grizzled Skipper is one of the most local species in the region and with its early spring emergence, small size and numbers it is often not even noticed. There are however, encouraging signs with new colonies being discovered by conservation minded companies and landowners allowing Butterfly Conservation access to their land.



# getting to know grizzled skippers

The Grizzled Skipper is a delightful little butterfly which if not resting seems to be frantically darting about on urgent business making it difficult to follow with the eye. Its distinctive black and white chequerboard wing pattern means it is unlikely to be confused with any other butterfly. It could be mistaken for small day-flying moths such as Latticed Heath or Mother Shipton if given a casual glance. Look closely at the wing pattern and antennae which is often feathery in moths. At night or in dull weather they often roost communally on grass or flower heads, although well-camouflaged, with practice this can be a good time to count them at some sites.



Grizzled Skipper



Mother Shipton



Latticed Heath



Grizzled Skippers showing underside



Dingy Skipper

## What can you do to help us?

### Survey and Monitoring

Find out where the butterfly may be found near you. In April, May and early June, help to monitor known populations and survey new sites. Knowing where new habitat can be made available for them near to existing colonies is an important conservation measure. Join a training workshop to learn more about the butterfly and its habitat needs.

### Habitat conservation work

Join your local branch of Butterfly Conservation and help with conservation work parties maintaining known Grizzled Skipper sites or restoring others in the region.

### Site Safeguard

Brownfield sites are perhaps now the most important habitat for the Grizzled Skipper; gravel workings, railways and similar disturbed ground sites can often present ideal conditions - habitats where, unfortunately, housing and other development work is currently being targeted.

Look out for development proposals at brownfield sites. Where development cannot be prevented appropriate mitigation measures such as planning conditions may help. The aim should be to retain key habitat already occupied by the butterfly and compensate for losses by creating new areas. Ensure that habitat creation techniques focus on natural colonisation rather than specific planting and the new habitat is within colonising distance of existing colonies so they can be inter-dependant.

### Seek advice

Landowners can follow management guidelines.

**Contact Butterfly Conservation for further help and information**  
[www.butterfly-conservation.org](http://www.butterfly-conservation.org)

## How do Grizzled Skippers live?

The adult butterflies normally live in 'colonies' (aggregations of adults in discrete habitats), which are typically small, comprising less than 50 individuals. Most adults stay within the colony, but dispersal distances of 1.5km have been recorded, and it is likely that the butterfly can fly much further.

The Grizzled Skipper is usually single brooded and adults emerge between the second and fourth weeks of April depending on how warm the spring has been. At individual sites the butterfly flies for 4-6 weeks and by mid-June the flight season is over at most localities. The majority of eggs, are laid singly on the underside of leaves of foodplants, such as Agrimony, Creeping Cinquefoil, Wild Strawberry and Tormentil growing in short vegetation (less than 5cm high), and often in proximity to bare ground, which provides a warm micro-climate for egg development.

The tiny caterpillar emerges after about 10 days and spins a protective tent along the midrib of its host leaf, feeding by grazing at the leaf and leaving characteristic blotches. After exhausting this food source and with increased size, the larva moves on to another leaf and builds a tent by sewing the leaf into the shape of a purse. More feeding at the edge of the tent occurs, the larva eventually eating itself out of a home! A series of new tents are constructed every few days usually on different plants of one or more of the foodplants listed above. As the caterpillars grow through the summer they may move into longer vegetation in search of bigger leaves to feed on and shelter in, even utilising coarse shrub leaves such as Bramble. They overwinter as pupae inside cocoons of leaves amongst low-growing (less than 20cm high) vegetation.

## What do Grizzled Skippers Need?

**In all habitat types the following vegetation is needed:**

An abundance of one or more of the following key larval foodplants; **Wild Strawberry, Barren Strawberry, Creeping Cinquefoil, Tormentil and Agrimony** growing in short vegetation and/or on bare ground in sunny, sheltered situations.

Large quantities of spring/early nectar sources such as **Daisy, Bugle, Bulbous Buttercup** and **Bird's-foot Trefoil**.

Stands of longer vegetation (20+ cm high), including Bramble for larval feeding and seed heads (40+cm high) from the previous year as roosting sites for adults.

Additionally, scrub edges (less than 4m tall) can be of high value providing shelter and to act as focal points for mate-location.

Large (more than 2 hectares) sites containing substantial quantities of at least one of the key foodplants, a variable grass height, patches of scrub and bare ground, will support the largest populations. Sites are more likely to persist in the long-term if they form part of a network of colonies linked by the butterflies potential to move between them.

## How to manage sites for Grizzled Skippers.

Great care is needed when managing sites for the Grizzled Skipper as many sites now have small and isolated populations which will be vulnerable to any large scale management work. Monitoring of Grizzled Skipper populations should be used to help verify the effects of management work. Contact Butterfly Conservation for further assistance.

**The objectives will be to create and maintain a mosaic of sward heights and areas of bare ground. Sward heights should range from short (less than 5cm, usually with bare ground) though medium (6-12 cm) to tall (more than 13cm) rank grassland associated with scrub of different age structures.**

### Farmland

Track and lane verges, or even arable field margins can sometimes present the right conditions but most colonies persisting on farmland in the region will be on areas of un-improved grassland. Some of these are likely to have other significant nature conservation interests and may already be receiving support and advice for their management. An important conservation measure for the Grizzled Skipper is ensuring that management regimes being supported by DEFRA under agri-environment schemes cater for its needs wherever appropriate.

### Brownfield Sites

Disused gravel workings, railways and similar disturbed ground sites can often present ideal conditions similar to both woodland and farmland sites. In some cases planted trees may need to be removed or thinned.

### Woodland and Rides

Clearings in woodlands are a vital and much reduced habitat for many butterflies. For the Grizzled Skipper its special habitat needs may more often be present along forestry track verges or the banks of ditches and rides. The exposed sub-soil or the stone beds of tracks can be the key element in providing the micro-habitat they need. Ideal conditions are provided in woodland re-growth in the first few years following felling or coppicing or in wide sunny rides which are regularly cut or disturbed.

### Grazing

Light, winter grazing by cattle without any grazing in the spring is the preferred management option. Sheep tend to create a uniform short grassland and are less likely to create localised bare ground. Rabbits can create ideal conditions for Grizzled Skipper but their numbers are notoriously difficult to manage and can lead to over-grazing or under-grazing.

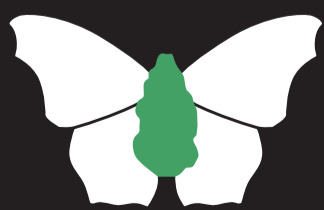
### Mowing

A rotational mowing regime in September for meadows and woodland rides can maintain sites for Grizzled Skipper but some machines can damage ant hills. It may be beneficial to restore open areas by scarification.

### Scrub Clearance

On many sites scrub will need to be routinely cleared to prevent breeding patches becoming overgrown and shaded. The bare ground exposed when scrub is cleared can provide conditions required by Wild Strawberry and other larval foodplants.

There is further detail available on the Species Action Plan available on Butterfly Conservation's website. [www.butterfly-conservation.org](http://www.butterfly-conservation.org)



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