



DINGY SKIPPER

Erynnis tages

1. INTRODUCTION

The dingy skipper butterfly is well-named. It appears from a distance to be drab and unspectacular and is easily mistaken for a day flying moth such as the burnet companion, or more likely, overlooked completely. In dull weather and at night it perches on the top of dead flower heads in a moth-like fashion with wings curved in a position not seen in any other British butterfly. On warm sunny days it can be highly active and territorial.



R. Lewington / BC

Dingy skipper sites must contain an abundance of bird's-foot trefoil, the larval foodplant, growing in clumps in sheltered dry grassy areas with some bare ground. Some taller vegetation is also required for shelter and roosting. The scrubbing over of such sites and the loss of foodplant poses the greatest threat to this species, which is in accelerated decline locally and nationally. Most colonies are found on early successional vegetation of post-industrial habitats such as brickworks, quarries, disused railways and spoilbanks. These colonies are often small and discrete with less than 50 adults present during peak flight periods between late spring and early summer.

2. OUR OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

	Target
A. Increase the level of monitoring so that more sites are covered (at least to the level of spot checks, timed visits or species transects) and collate the results to establish population status and distribution.	2003 onwards
B. Encourage the protection and appropriate management of sites where dingy skipper occurs and ensure that any management at known sites is sensitive to the habitat requirements of the butterfly.	ongoing
C. Publicise the habitat requirements of this butterfly to landowners and other interested parties involved in their conservation and give advice on beneficial management.	by 2005
D. To halt the decline of dingy skipper and expand its range	by 2010
E. Develop a better understanding of the ecological requirements of this species and the best management practices.	by 2010

ASSOCIATED HABITAT PLANS

- Quarries & Gravel Pits
- Disused Industrial & Railway Land
- Lowland Calcareous Grassland
- Roadside Verges

ASSOCIATED SPECIES PLANS

- Small Blue
- Chalk Carpet
- Cuckoo Bee
- Dotted Bee-fly
- Rare Bumblebees

3. NATIONAL BAP OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

Although the dingy skipper is not listed in the Species of Conservation Concern in Biodiversity (DoE, 1995), Butterfly Conservation state that recent information on declines suggest that it would now qualify and may even qualify as a Priority Species.

Butterfly Conservation has produced a National Action Plan (Bourn et al. 2000) for this species and has classed the species as “*medium priority*” for conservation action.

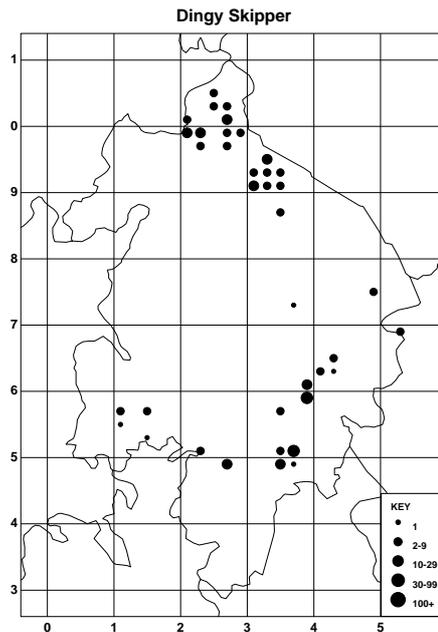
The immediate major objectives of the Butterfly Conservation Action Plan are:

- *to halt the rapid decline of this butterfly in the UK*
- *to maintain viable networks of populations throughout its current range*
- *to conduct research on the distribution and ecology of the species to enable its effective conservation*
- *in the long-term to restore its 1950 range*

4. CURRENT STATUS

The dingy skipper is a relatively widespread species in the southern half of the UK, but declined substantially in many areas during the 20th century. This decline has been most marked in the eastern counties of England and lowland Scotland where the species is now rare, and it is becoming far more restricted in its remaining English and Welsh strongholds. The Butterfly National Monitoring survey shows that the number of 10km grid squares occupied by the species has declined by 40% since 1972-1982 (Asher et al, 2001). The strongholds for this species are central and southern counties of England.

The Millennium Atlas Survey 1995-1999 found 38 sites for dingy skipper in Warwickshire, spread over 14 tetrads. The distribution map shows a concentration of sites on post industrial habitats in the north of the county and a spread of sites across the southern half of the county from west to east that reflects the limestone and lias grasslands, spoilheaps and quarry distribution and matches that of the grizzled skipper.



This species survives at low population densities on most post industrial sites in the county and monitoring of sites in 2000 and 2001 has rarely revealed double figure counts. The best sites currently are the disused railway line at Goldicote, Harbury Spoilbank, Bishops Hill and the Kingsbury Colliery restored spoilheap. All these sites are post-industrial and most are vulnerable to development pressure.

4.1 Legal and Policy Status

The species itself is not protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, but some of the sites at which it occurs are given protection as Sites of Special Scientific Interest such as Harbury Spoilbank (part of Harbury Railway Cutting SSSI).

4.2 Current Factors Affecting The Species

- **Lack of and inappropriate management** to control natural succession of grassland to scrub or to prevent grassland becoming rank.
- **Destruction of suitable habitat** through housing, industrial development, intensive agriculture, tree planting or land 'improvement'.
- **Trampling.** As this species is highly localised within sites, it can be affected in the larval and pupal stages by trampling from people and animals between July and April.
- **Fragmentation** and isolation of existing colonies

5. CURRENT LOCAL ACTION

Current conservation action is largely reactive to threats to sites containing dingy skipper.

- The dingy skipper is present on a number of actively managed sites
- Monitoring takes place on a number of sites by Butterfly Conservation Warwickshire Branch volunteers and Warwickshire Wildlife Trust reserve wardens.
- Scrub removal is carried out on disused railway sites in the Rugby area by work parties organised by the Warwickshire Branch of Butterfly Conservation volunteers.
- Scrub control takes place at Harbury on all three areas of landownership (WWT, farmer and NetworkRail) for the benefit of butterflies in general.

6. PROPOSED LOCAL ACTIONS

ACTION	Lead	Partners	By	Meets objective
Policy & Legislation				
PL1. Ensure that all relevant species policy is included in Local Planning Documents (see ODPM Planning Policy Statement PPS9).	WDC	WWT BC SDC NWBC	2005	B, D
PL2. Secure the protection of habitats where dingy skipper occurs.	WDC	WWT BC EN SDC NWBC	2005	B, D
Site / Species Safeguard & Management				
SM1. Encourage protection of all known dingy skipper colonies and secure 4 sites within the meta-population area.	BC	WWT LOs WDC SDC NWBC	ongoing 2006	B, C, D
SM2. Seek to ensure sites with recorded colonies have management plans which use best practice for dingy skipper conservation.	BC	SDC WDC WWT NWBC	2005	B, C, D
SM3. Encourage the protection and appropriate management of limestone grassland and former industrial sites to create suitable habitat for dingy skipper.	BC	WWT LOs WDC EN SDC NWBC	ongoing 2006	B, C, D

SM4. Include habitat requirements of dingy skipper when drawing up mitigation or restoration measures in the development control process for quarries, “brownfield” land etc, where located adjacent to existing colonies.	WDC	BC WM SDC NWBC	2003 onwards	B, C, D
SM5. Include habitat requirements of the dingy skipper (i.e. seeding new road verges, cuttings etc. with bird’s-foot trefoil) in the management of public open space (e.g. disused railway lines, road verges and parks) in areas where the butterfly occurs.	WDC	BC SDC NWBC	2004 onwards	B
SM6. Seek and develop opportunities to establish new colonies on road side verges, new quarries and landfill sites.	BC	WDC SDC NWBC LOs	2003 onwards	D
Advisory				
A1. Disseminate information to landowners to introduce management for dingy skipper.	BC	WWT EN WDC SDC NWBC FWAG	2005	C, D
Research & Monitoring				
RM1. Survey former locations where current status of this species is not clear.	BC	WWT	2005	A
RM2. Establish monitoring at all key sites to determine any change in status.	BC	WWT	2004 onwards	A, E
RM3. Target former industrial / derelict land sites to survey for the presence of this species.	BC	WWT	2005	A, E
RM4. Promote, support and monitor ecological research to assist long-term conservation of this species.	BC	All	2005	D, E
RM5. Map meta-populations using habitat survey information. Prioritise areas for potential new colonies within or near to existing meta-populations.	BC		2006	C, D
Communication, Education & Publicity				
CP1. Raise awareness of the decline of the dingy skipper butterfly and its importance in conservation management through talks to relevant local groups, regular press releases, activities and events.	BC	All	2003 onwards	C

CP2. Maintain communication with Butterfly Conservation and the relevant staff/representatives of English Nature.	WM		ongoing	A, B, D
CP3. Highlight the dingy skipper's ability to survive at low population levels and therefore the need for careful monitoring at former and existing sites through close liaison with landowners and managers.	BC	WWT EN	ongoing	B, C

Abbreviations: BC – Butterfly Conservation, EN – English Nature, FWAG – Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group, LO – Landowner, NWBC – North Warwick Borough Council, SDC – Stratford District Council, WDC – Warwick District Council, WM – Warwickshire Museum, WWT – Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.

7. REFERENCES (see also **LBAP Bibliography** web page)

Asher, J., Warren, M., Fox, R., Harding, P., Jeffcoate, G. and Jeffcoate S. (2001). The Millennium Atlas of Butterflies in Britain and Ireland. Oxford University Press. Oxford.

Bourn, N.A.D., Jeffcoate, G.E. and Warren, M.S. (2000). Dingy Skipper *Erynnis tages*. Species Action Plan. Butterfly Conservation.

DoE. (1995) *Species of Conservation Concern in Biodiversity*. The UK Steering Group Report.

8. FURTHER INFORMATION (see separate **Links** web page for links to web sites)

Butterfly Conservation Action Plan

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