



SMALL BLUE

Cupido minimus

1. INTRODUCTION

The small blue is the smallest of the resident British butterflies and can be easily overlooked, partly through its size and dusky colouring, but partly because it is usually confined to small patches of sheltered grassland that support its sole foodplant, kidney vetch. The ideal habitats typically contain a mosaic of short and tall vegetation and patches of light scrub.



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Males set up territories in sheltered positions, perching on tall grass or scrub. Once mated, the females disperse to lay eggs but both sexes may be found from late afternoon onwards in communal roosts, facing head down in long grass. The butterfly tends to live in small colonies, where the populations fluctuate greatly, possibly linked to variable flower production of the kidney vetch on which it breeds. The small blue is declining in most areas of the UK.

2. OUR OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

	Target
A. Continue to monitor all known sites annually with spot checks, timed visits or species transects and collate the results to establish population status and distribution.	2003 onwards
B. Encourage the protection through SSSI or SINC status and appropriate management of sites where small blue occurs.	2003 onwards
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. Seek opportunities to extend breeding areas to form a network of linked habitats in order to halt species decline.	by 2005
E. Restore colonies at 5 former sites	by 2010

ASSOCIATED HABITAT PLANS

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

ASSOCIATED SPECIES PLANS

- Chalk Carpet
- Dingy Skipper
- Rare Bumblebees
- Dotted Beefly
- Cuckoo Bee

3. NATIONAL BAP OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

The small blue is listed in the Species of Conservation Concern in Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report (DOE, 1995). Butterfly Conservation have produced a National Species Action Plan and have classed the species as “medium priority” for conservation action.

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

- *Halt decline.*
- *Maintain viable networks of populations throughout its current range.*
- *Conduct research on the ecology and distribution of the species to enable its effective conservation.*
- *Long term objective to restore its 1950 range.*

4. CURRENT STATUS

UK BAP Status: Species of Conservation Concern.

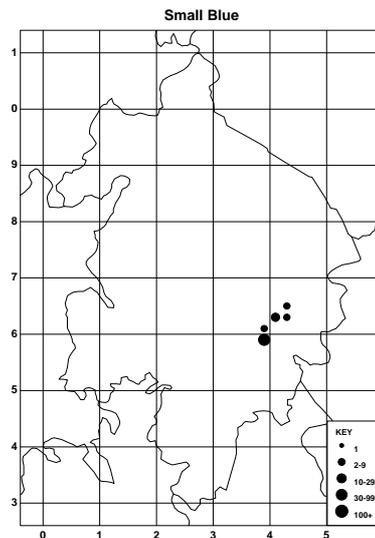
Butterfly Conservation National Priority: Medium.

European Status: Not threatened.

The small blue is relatively widely distributed but rare in calcicolous and coastal habitats throughout England, Scotland, Wales and at a single site in Northern Ireland. It has declined severely in many areas since 1950, most noticeably in central and eastern counties of England, north Wales and southern Scotland where the species is now almost absent. It has become more restricted in its remaining southern strongholds. The current rate of loss of colonies in central southern England was estimated at 7% per decade (during the 1980's), although the species is still relatively widespread in this area. Elsewhere the decline appears to be far greater and data from the 1995 to 1999 recording period showed that the species was not found in 30% of 10-km squares where it was recorded during 1970 and 1982.

The Millennium Atlas Survey 1995-1999 found 5 sites for small blue in Warwickshire, spread over 3 tetrads. The species has been lost from 9 sites in Warwickshire since 1970. In the last five years the number of colonies has fallen to just 3. It can be seen

from the map that this species is extremely localised within the county, being confined to the limestone grassland areas of the quarries and spoil heaps near Southam.



The two largest colonies are currently found at Bishops Hill and Southam Quarry between Long Itchington and Southam. A further small colony can be found at Bishops Bowl. The species appears to have been lost from Stockton, Harbury Spoilbank and Ufton Fields (Local Nature Reserve) since 1999.

4.1 Legal and Policy Status

In Britain the small blue is listed on Schedule 5 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act , which only protects the species from sale. It is fully protected under the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order (1985).

4.2 Current Factors Affecting The Species

- **Lack of, or inappropriate management to control natural succession** of grassland to scrub or to prevent grassland becoming rank and to maintain populations of the foodplant kidney vetch.
- **Increasing fragmentation and isolation of existing colonies** which prevents the butterfly from coping with extremes of climate such as drought.
- **Loss of suitable habitat** through afforestation, development and the abandonment of active cement quarries causing the loss of early successional habitat.
- **Difficulties in maintaining networks of suitably managed habitats** under different ownerships.
- **Trampling** –as this species is highly localised within habitats, it can be affected in the larval and pupal stages between July and April by trampling from people and animals.

5. CURRENT LOCAL ACTION

There is currently no management taking place at any site containing small blue colonies. Habitat quality is maintained by rabbit activity, active quarry management. Off-road motorcycling has caused ground disturbance which in some cases has aided the establishment of the foodplant, however, such uncontrolled activity could be damaging to the larval and pupal stages and can also damage existing patches of Kidney Vetch.

Past management on sites has included cutting small scallops in areas of scrub and on Harbury Spoilbank and at Stockton, planting of Kidney Vetch from local seed in 1996/97 all of which failed. Scrub cutting has been undertaken on Network Rail and other privately owned areas of the SSSI for the benefit of the butterflies in general. Monitoring takes place on all known sites by Butterfly Conservation Warwickshire Branch volunteers.

6. PROPOSED LOCAL ACTIONS

ACTION	Lead	Partner	By	Meets objective
Policy & Legislation				
PL1. Ensure that all relevant species policy is included in Local Planning Documents (see ODPM Planning Policy Statement PPS9).	LBAPSG	WWT BC EN SDC	2005	B
PL2. Ensure all known small blue sites are considered for designation as SINCs or SSSIs.	WBRC	WWT EN BC SDC WSP	2005	B
Site / Species Safeguard & Management				
SM1. Secure the protection of all known small blue colonies.	BC	SDC LOs WWT	2004	B C
SM2. Protect and manage all sites that have held colonies in the last 10 years.	BC	WWT EN SDC LOs	2004	B C E
Advisory				
A1. Disseminate information to landowners and other agencies to introduce management for small blue.	BC	WWT SDC FWAG	2005	C
Research & Monitoring				
RM1. Survey all former locations to assess opportunities for recolonisation.	BC	WWT	2005	A

RM2. Establish habitat monitoring at all current sites and all sites that have held colonies in the last 10 years to determine any change of suitability for small blue.	BC	WWT	2003	A
RM3. Promote and support ecological research aimed at promoting measures to assist long-term conservation of this species if current decline continues.	BC	All	2005	C
Communication, Education & Publicity				
CP1. Raise awareness of the decline of the small blue butterfly and its conservation management needs, through articles in the media related to local activities and issues.	BC	All	ongoing	C
CP2. Maintain communication with the national recording scheme and the relevant staff / representatives of Natural England.	BC		ongoing	A, B, D

Abbreviations: BC – Butterfly Conservation, EN – English Nature, FWAG – Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group, LBAPSG – Local Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group, LO – Landowner, SDC – Stratford District Council, WSP – Wildlife Sites Project, WWT – Warwickshire Wildlife Trust

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

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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RSPB (2007) '*Farm Wildlife Handbook*' from Publications, RSPB, Unit 17, St Martin's Business Centre, St Martin's Way, Bedford MK42 0LF, tel. 01234 263616 or email: publications@rspb.org.uk.

9. CONTACT

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