

## REGIONAL AND COUNTRY ACTION PLANS

Butterfly Conservation's (BC) Conservation Strategy describes our approach to the conservation of butterflies and moths over the next 10 years. The strategy prioritises both species and landscapes across the UK, providing a framework for conservation delivery at country and regional scales. Country and regional conservation priorities and targets were initially set through our National (NAPs) and Regional Action Plans (RAPs) produced in the period 1997-2000 and helped shape the conservation work of BC's staff, Branches and volunteers.

Although some action plans were revised during the 2000s, all have been reviewed in recent years to reflect the changing priorities outlined in the new Conservation Strategy for 2016-2025. The original England RAPs were based on government regional boundaries, but following their dissolution, the revised RAPs were written to follow existing BC Branch boundaries, reducing their number from nine to six. The reviews have been undertaken in close consultation with and agreement of the relevant BC Branches.

Reviews are also underway for our Country Action Plans (CAPs) in Wales and Northern Ireland and for our RAPs in Scotland.

Each RAP comprises a spreadsheet and a series of maps. The spreadsheet comprises five worksheets:

### 1. Butterfly Priorities

The worksheet lists all priority butterfly species from the original RAPs, together with several relevant status assessments:

- Great Britain Red List status (based on IUCN threat criteria)
- Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981): legal protection
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) Section 41: England only
- UK Biodiversity Action Plan
- EU Red List status (based on IUCN threat criteria)
- Habitats Directive: Annexes 2 (core areas designated SACs) and 4 (protection across entire natural range)
- BC's UK priorities in 1997 (Warren et al, 1997 and used in Asher et al, 2001)
- BC's UK priorities in 2005 (Bourn et al, 2005)
- BC's UK priorities in 2017 and their further risk-based prioritisation as outlined in the Conservation Strategy

In the original RAPs species were categorised as **High (H)**, **Medium (M)** or **Low (L) Priority** based on an analysis of rates of decline, rarity or proportion of UK resource within the region. Species which fulfilled one or more of the following criteria qualified for a higher rating than the UK-wide priority: 1) estimated decline >32% 10km<sup>2</sup> over 25 years, 2) occupied <0.6% tetrads in the region or 3) where the region held >20% of the UK resource for that species.

Priorities for the revised RAPs were reassessed through detailed discussion with regional staff and Branch experts. In some regions, where a high number of priority species are present, an additional category of **High\* (Highest) Priority** was introduced. An explanation of any priority changes is included in the worksheet.

### 2. Moth Priorities

The worksheet lists all priority moth species from the original RAPs, together with several relevant status assessments:

- Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981): legal protection
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) Section 41: England only
- UK Biodiversity Action Plan
- Habitats Directive: Annexes 2 (core areas designated SACs) and 4 (protection across entire natural range)
- BC's UK priorities in 2017 and their further risk-based prioritisation as outlined in the Conservation Strategy

In the original RAPs, only High or Medium Priority moths were included based on expert assessment of UK-wide rarity. In the revised RAPs, priorities were reassessed by firstly checking the status in each constituent county using the following categories:

- P = Present post-2000 (i.e. more widespread than a few sites)
- PO = No records post-2000 but may still be resident (i.e. likely to under-recorded)
- P? = Present post-2000 but breeding status doubtful (i.e. either vagrant records or no longer breeding)
- UNC = Uncommon (i.e. present but only a handful of records and probably not just under-recorded)
- E = Extinct
- NRR = No recent records post-2000
- RR = Recent record (e.g. record in last c.10 years but more detailed assessment not possible to enable placement in higher categories above)
- R = Record in database but status very uncertain
- LR = Year last record (e.g. only for species whose status is ambiguous, may be in decline or under-recorded)
- FR – Year first record (e.g. only for species whose status is ambiguous such as new colonists or under-recorded)
- UC = status uncertain (e.g. species without confirmed records but included in county lists, suspected to occur, recorded just outside county boundaries, hard to find or do not readily come to light)
- V = Vagrant

Once these assessments were complete, each species was then re-categorised as High (H), Medium (M) or Low (L) by Mark Parsons, Head of Moth Conservation in consultation with expert regional staff and Branch opinion. Survey/Monitoring, Research or Advice/Site Management actions were assigned to each species. Due to the large number of moth species listed in each RAP, in general no actions were assigned to Low Priority and only Survey/Monitoring actions to Medium Priority species.

The lists of High Priority moth species were appraised further and an additional H\* (Highest) Priority assigned to 15-30 moth species in each region, where expert opinion suggested these species habitat requirements were sufficiently well understood to enable effective conservation programmes to be designed.

### **3. Priority Landscapes**

BC increasingly works to conserve butterflies and moths at the landscape-scale. Within each region landscapes were identified and mapped which encompassed networks of sites supporting one or more H\*, H or M priority butterflies or H\* priority moths. Priority landscapes were selected ensure the majority, or in some cases all, of the distribution of the high/highest species is encompassed by the landscape boundaries.

Landscapes which supported 1) a high number of priority species, 2) a significant proportion of the distribution or number of occupied sites for one or more higher priority species, 3)

networks of occupied, former and potential sites for one or more higher priority species which lend themselves to a landscape-scale conservation approach or 4) one or more semi-natural habitat types which lend themselves to appropriate management intervention, were designated **High Priority Landscapes**.

Where appropriate existing landscape boundaries (e.g. National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) were adopted, but in most instances these were drawn by knowledgeable staff and volunteers using linear geographical features such as roads, rivers or railway lines.

The occurrence of priority species in each landscape was noted in the worksheet using the appropriate regional priority rating (H\*, H or M). Priority species which had become **Extinct (E)**, been **Re/introduced (R)** or whose **Status is uncertain (?)** were also noted. In some instances the regional priority was raised or decreased for a particular landscape, where expert opinion deemed the species was especially threatened or considered stable.

The majority of landscapes occurred wholly or mostly within one Branch area. Where landscapes were split between Branches separate assessments were compiled for each. A small number of landscapes crossed regional boundaries and in these cases their assessment was reported in the RAP encompassing the majority of the area. The exception to this was the Chilterns, which is reported in both the East England (with separate assessments for Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire) and South East England (for Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire combined).

For each landscape a traffic light system was used to qualitatively assess the progress BC has made towards conserving those species under threat, so that we can plan where we need to maintain our efforts or, for example, develop new projects:

0 = Unknown.

1 = No conservation delivery:

- Occasional recording of target species.
- Target species monitored on few sites.

2 = Limited conservation delivery:

- Co-ordinated surveys undertaken enabling distribution of target species across the landscape to be mapped.
- Co-ordinated monitoring undertaken across several sites, enabling assessment of target species abundance trend.
- Management advice provided on some sites.
- Recovery management implemented on some sites (e.g. work parties).

3 = Full conservation delivery:

- Co-ordinated monitoring programme established on many sites enabling assessment of target species abundance trend and effectiveness of conservation action.
- Management advice given to landowners across whole site networks.
- Co-ordinated programme of recovery management implemented across whole site networks.
- Long-term sustainable management (e.g. agri-environment schemes) implemented across sites.

Note this analysis only assesses conservation action and does not measure species responses. Note also that a 'favourable' assessment does not imply BC need no longer target work for that species in that landscape.

#### **4. Key Sites**

Not all sites supporting priority species fall within defined landscapes, especially those habitat specialist moths known from only one or two locations and these are identified and mapped as **Priority Sites** within the regional and country action plans.

#### **5. Moth Actions**

Detailed actions for butterfly species and landscapes have not been produced as these are agreed as and when projects are developed or Branches undertake local conservation action. However, in the case of the Highest (H\*) Priority moths, key conservation actions have been outlined and an indication whether such work should be led by staff (S), volunteers (V) or both (S/V). It is intended this additional guidance will stimulate development of specific projects to address their conservation needs.

#### **6. Regional and Landscape Maps**

For each region we have produced a map showing the location of priority landscapes and priority sites. For each landscape we will produce maps which highlight those priority species that occur there, together with a short statement of the most appropriate management for that species. These will be added to each RAP folder as they are produced.

#### **7. Northern England**

The Northern England Regional Action Plan encompasses Cumbria, Lancashire, Cheshire, North East England and Yorkshire Branches.

#### **8. West Midlands**

The West Midlands England Regional Action Plan encompasses West Midlands and Warwickshire Branches.

#### **9. East Midlands**

The East Midlands Regional Action Plan encompasses Lincolnshire and East Midlands Branches.

#### **10. East England**

The East England Regional Action Plan Encompasses Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire & Essex, Bedfordshire & Northamptonshire and Hertfordshire & Middlesex Branches.

#### **11. South West England**

The South West England Regional Action Plan Encompasses Cornwall, Devon, Somerset & Bristol, Dorset, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire Branches. No Key Sites worksheet is included in the South West England RAP.

#### **12. South East England**

The South East England Regional Action Plan encompasses Hampshire & Isle of Wight, Upper Thames, Sussex, Surrey & SW London and Kent Branches.

#### **13. Review**

The RAPs have been designed as working documents which prioritise species, landscapes and sites, and enable recording of conservation progress. It is envisaged the Priority Landscapes and Priority Sites worksheets will be updated annually or biennially through Regional Branch Liaison Meetings.