

# SUFFOLK LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

## Silver studded blue butterfly



### **1 Definition of habitat or species**

This is a butterfly characteristic of lowland heathland that was once widespread across the UK, but is now confined to southern England with outposts in East Anglia and Wales. As a caterpillar it feeds on heathers and gorse and has a complex relationship with black ants. Adults can occur at high density in favourable years on suitable patches of heathland.

### **2 Current status: national, regional, and local (including trends and losses)**

#### **2.1 National**

The Silver-studded blue was widely distributed in England at the turn of the century, but has become extinct in all counties except those in the south and south-west, small parts of East Anglia (Norfolk and Suffolk), Wales and the west midlands. It is now common only in Dorset and Hampshire. It is absent from 65% of 10km squares that were occupied before 1940.

#### **2.2 Local**

The species was abundant in the Suffolk Brecklands, especially between Brandon and Tuddenham, as little as 50 years ago, but the last record was made in 1965. It is now confined to the Sandlings and here it was also formerly widespread, occurring on most heaths between Lowestoft and Ipswich. Strong colonies now occur only on the extensive heathlands of Westleton and Minsmere in the north and on a few heaths close to Ipswich and Hollesley in the south. Most are small by national standards and occupy patches of heathland of less than 2ha. Two sites were established by introductions in 1986 and one in 1998; one is now the largest colony in the county and has stimulated the colonisation of nearby heathland. A third introduction was made in 2007. Two new sites have been colonised naturally.

## 2.3 Natural Areas

Suffolk Coast & Heaths Natural Area (also formerly in Breckland).

## 3 Current factors affecting the species or habitats

- The species requires heathland on light sandy soils in an early stage of development after disturbance or burning that is characterised on the Sandlings by the presence of Bell heather (*Erica cinerea*), patches of loose soil and short turf. Conditions, once attained, can be prolonged by intense rabbit or sheep grazing or occasionally by mowing, but eventually soils will either grass or moss over and stabilise, or Ling (*Calluna vulgaris*) dominates, excluding large nests of the ants on which it depends (*Lasius niger* and *L. alienus*). Most colonies in Suffolk are on previous summer burns or areas of disturbance.
- Colonies in Suffolk are largely adequately managed and there are few factors causing further loss of colonies. However, management of many current colonies is seldom harsh enough to encourage fresh conditions for the butterfly and there is a general succession trend on many colonies. The small size of colonies restricts this type of management at many sites.

The following have been implicated in the historical loss of colonies and may become important again in the future. They are similar to factors afflicting the lowland heathland habitat as a whole:

- Destruction of heathland habitat through industrial, housing or recreational development particularly in the Ipswich area.
- Destruction of heathland for agriculture or forestry (the latter was probably largely responsible for the loss of the Breckland population).
- Decline in the traditional management such as grazing by livestock, cutting and burning that maintained heathland and prevented succession.

There are factors that currently limit the potential of the species for expansion to other parts of the Sandlings:

- Isolation of the current heathland sites.
- Colonisation of bare ground by the naturalised encrusting moss *Campylopus introflexus*

## 4 Current action

### 4.1 Protection

- Listed on the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 with respect to sale only.
- Most colonies occur on protected sites either heathland nature reserves, County Wildlife Sites or SSSIs.

### 4.2 Management, research and guidance

- Recovery plans for the species have been prepared for the Sandlings Group (1996) and Forest Enterprise (1997), giving details of necessary action to maintain the species and encourage spread on the Sandlings.
- The previous SAP included a possible reintroduction of the butterfly to the Brecklands but this is not currently a priority.
- The heathland of most colonies is managed with specific prescriptions for Silver-studded Blues and it has been a target species in recent restoration and maintenance programmes such as Tomorrow's Heathland Heritage.

- Reviews of the effects of management and monitoring of all populations, including those established at introduction sites, have occurred at regular intervals since 1985. Work on population sizes and their relation to recent management was carried out in 1994 and repeated for some sites in 2003.
- Sandlings Group members perform informal monitoring of populations annually, incorporating the input from volunteer groups including BC.
- The RSPB have established a colony at their reserve at Aldringham Walks; butterflies have colonised the heathland re-creation at Minsmere; three new areas have been colonised on the Sutton and Hollesley Heaths SSSI; a new site has been discovered at Ransomes Europark and partially protected as a CWS; an introduction was made at Blaxhall Common in 2007 by BC and SWT.
- Awareness about the butterfly and its needs has been raised through the Suffolk Coast and Heaths heathland leaflet of 2007, Tomorrow's Heathland Heritage reports, a new Sandlings website, and various events and press coverage.

## 5 Targets

- 1 Maintain the existing range of baseline survey 2005 (Butterflies for the new Millennium plus five) until 2010 and beyond.
- 2 Expand distribution of the silver-studded blue within current range by 2010.
- 3 Increase populations at existing colonies by 2010

### **Baseline 2005, targets for 2010, and identify targets for long term species or habitat viability for 2015 and 2020 and longer term (if desired)**

## 6 Actions

<b>Action (apply SMART approach and include locations where relevant).</b>	<b>Achieve by date</b>	<b>Delivery partners (identify lead bold and support partners plain)</b>
<b>Policy &amp; Legislation</b>		
Include the needs of the Silver-studded Blue where appropriate when reviewing agri-environment schemes (e.g. Environmental Stewardship)	2007-2010 Annual	<b>NE</b>
Support the re-establishment of heathland from afforested land where appropriate to the assist the conservation of the silver-studded blue	2007-2010 Annual	<b>FC</b>
Ensure ssb as an LBAP species and its habitat, is recognized and protected in Local Development Frameworks in accordance with PPS9.	Annual 2007-10	<b>SCC, NE, RSPB, SWT, FC, SCDC, IBC.</b>
Ensure all relevant BAP species including ssb are considered in the AONB management review discussions during 2007.	2007	<b>SCHU</b>
<b>Or species protection/management</b>		
Ensure development proposals do not affect SSB colonies or habitat	2007-2010 Annual	<b>SWT, IBC, SCDC, SCC, NE,</b>
Ensure all heathland sites that not otherwise protected are assessed for CWS status	2007-2010 Annual	<b>SWT, SCC, NE</b>
Ensure continued effective management at all	2007-2010	<b>SWT, RSPB, NE, NT, SCDC,</b>

Sandlings colonies of the Silver-studded blue including improved connectivity.	Annual	MOD
Ensure that the requirements of the Silver-studded blue are included in all heathland management, restoration or creation plans, including SSSI management plans	2007-2010 Annual	SWT, RSPB, NE, NT, SCDC, MOD,
Prepare heathland within gaps of former range of species on the Sandlings specifically for the species	2007-2010 Annual	SWT, RSPB, NE, NT, SCDC, IBC, Greenways, FC,
Investigate opportunities for establishing two new colonies on the Sandlings using introductions, especially in current gaps in former range such as in the vicinity of Snape, Blaxhall, Tunstall, Walberswick and within the forests of Rendlesham and Tunstall	2007-2010 Annual	SWT, RSPB, NE, NT, SCDC, BC, FC
If suitable habitat is found or prepared successfully, introduce the species to two sites on the Sandlings.	2007-2010 Annual	BC
<b>Research and monitoring</b>		
Undertake a five yearly review of the population size of colonies on the Sandlings and the effects of recent management.	2008	BC
Continue annual monitoring at specified sites	2007-2010 Annual	BC, SWT, RSPB, NE, NT, SCDC,
Ensure standardised techniques at monitored colonies	2007-2010 Annual	BC, RSPB, SWT
Monitor sites for new colonies	2007-10 annual	BC, SWT, RSPB, NE, NT, SCDC.
Continue research into the ecology of and habitat management for the ssb.	2007-10 annual	BC
<b>Advisory</b>		
Include in Environmental Stewardship agreements prescriptions that support the management of heathland for Silver-studded Blues; increase in the area of heathland and improve links between colonies.	2007-2010 Annual	NE
Ensure site managers are aware of the habitat requirements of Silver-studded blue	2007-2010 Annual	SWT, RSPB, NE, NT, SCDC, BC, IBC
<b>Communications and publicity</b>		
Use the SSB as a flagship species to publicise the conservation and the sympathetic management of heathland to benefit all associated species. Undertake at least two press releases raising the profile of this BAP species each year. Produce a heathland leaflet and publicise on websites.	2007-10 Annual	BC, SCHU, RSPB, NE, NT, SCDC, IBC, SWT
Undertake one event per year that draw attention to silver studded blue	2007-2010 Annual	BC, SCHU, RSPB, NE, NT, SCDC, IBC, SWT

Ensure future reporting and review of this action plan is forwarded to the National silver-studded blue steering group co-ordinated by BC & NE	2007-10 Annual	NE, BC, BAP.
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**NB Where achieve by dates are 2007-2010 this means they need to be achieved or worked towards by 2007 and annually renewed until 2010.**

**Monitoring of progress:**

Reported annually on the UK BAP reporting system BARS Biodiversity Action Reporting system.

**List of organisations that have been consulted regarding this plan and have agreed to aim to deliver their organisations commitments:**

Suffolk Wildlife Trust- David Mason  
RSPB and Sandlings Group- Rob Macklin  
Natural England- Monica O'Donnell, Nick Sibbett, Bill Nickson  
Butterfly Conservation- Rob Parker  
Suffolk Coast and Heaths Unit- Malcolm Farrow  
Suffolk Coastal District Council (SCDC)- John Davies  
Greenways- James Baker  
Ipswich Borough Council Steve Hunt  
Suffolk Biodiversity Partnership officer- Mary Norden  
Suffolk County Council- Sue Hooton  
MOD