

21 GRIZZLED SKIPPER SPECIES ACTION PLAN

21.1 INTRODUCTION

The Grizzled Skipper *Pyrgus malvae* usually occurs in small, self-contained colonies, the largest containing no more than 150 individuals. Individuals may not move more than a few hundred metres, thereby limiting scope for colonisation of new sites. The species generally only has one generation per year in Britain. After overwintering in the pupal stage, Grizzled Skippers emerge between mid-April and early May, depending on spring weather conditions. The flight period is generally early May to mid-June, though can be mid-April to the end of May in a warm, sunny spring.

Eggs are laid singly on various members of the Rose family, including Wild Strawberry *Fragaria vesca*, Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, Creeping Cinquefoil *Potentilla reptans*, Agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria*, and brambles *Rubus fruticosus* agg. After about 10 days, the larvae emerge, and form silken shelters from which they feed, and later entire leaves may be spun together. Pupation occurs after about 2 months on or near to the ground in a silken cocoon amongst rough vegetation. Little is known about predators or parasites of this species.

This species breeds in two main habitat types; firstly unimproved grasslands, particularly calcareous grasslands, with a rather sparse, though not necessarily short vegetation at the margins of scrub; and secondly, sheltered, but unshaded woodland rides and clearings. Sunny, sheltered conditions are preferred in both habitats, where the foodplants occur as lush, bushy growths.

21.2 CURRENT STATUS

The Grizzled Skipper occurs throughout Europe as far north as northern England, Wales, and southern Scandinavia. The status of the species throughout the rest of Europe is not known in detail, though it is likely to be fairly common in southern and central Europe (Thomas and Lewington, 1991).

The Grizzled Skipper was formerly widespread with scattered colonies as far north as Yorkshire. However, this century in England and Wales the species has undergone a contraction in range, particularly in eastern counties, including Hertfordshire, though the precise extent of this can not be accurately quantified. It is now rare outside central southern England, but is still half expected to be found in any suitable habitat from the Cotswolds and Chilterns southwards.

In Hertfordshire at the beginning of this century, the Grizzled Skipper was regarded as locally common. However, a marked decline began in the 1950s and 1960s, with the period from 1970-1986 showing a 43% decline in range compared with pre-1970 (Sawford, 1987). By the mid 1980s small numbers were only found in a handful of discrete areas at Aldbury Nowers, Ashridge, Therfield Heath, in the Mimram valley, Bramfield and Broxbourne Woods. However, in the past decade a further rapid decline has occurred with the species only being recorded in the last five years as scattered individuals from Aldbury Nowers, a recently discovered large colony of at least 30

individuals at Waterford Heath, near Hertford and a small colony at Frogmore Pit, Aston near Stevenage.

21.3 CURRENT FACTORS CAUSING LOSS OR DECLINE

21.3.1 Loss of Habitat

This century over 90% of unimproved grasslands have been lost, mainly due to ploughing for arable production or reseeded with simple agricultural grass mixes.

21.3.2 Change in Woodland Management

Changes in woodland management, particularly neglect of rides and clearings, has resulted in shading out of the sheltered, open habitats, favoured in woodlands. In addition, modern intensive high forest systems, which reduce both the area and frequency of creation of open space within the woodland, result in an increased isolation of suitable open habitats.

21.3.3 Fragmentation and Isolation of Remaining Habitat

Many remaining suitable habitats and colonies are isolated from each other, which because of this species poor dispersal powers, increases the chances of localised extinctions and decreases the chances of re-colonisation.

21.4 CURRENT ACTION

The species is not specifically protected or listed in any conservation legislation or conventions. Nationally, this species is not highlighted for specific conservation action in "Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report" (HMSO, 1995).

However, locally in Hertfordshire, because of its rapid and severe decline, conservation action for this species should be afforded a **high priority**.

The ecology of this species is fairly well understood and practical management requirements for both grassland and woodland ride sites are known. Appropriate management is moderate grazing of unimproved grasslands and maintenance of a continuous supply of open, sheltered, sunny woodland clearings.

21.5 GRIZZLED SKIPPER ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES

To halt the rapid decline of the Grizzled Skipper in Hertfordshire, by maintaining and enhancing current populations at Aldbury Nowers, Waterford Heath and Frogmore Pit.

To conduct further research on the distribution of the species locally, to provide accurate and up to date knowledge of the species.

In 50 years to have restored the species to its 1970 range, with at least a half a dozen self-sustaining colonies or groups of colonies.

21.6 PROPOSED ACTIONS

21.6.1 Policy and Legislation

GS1. Ensure all sites containing Grizzled Skipper are recognised and protected in Local Plans at next review.

Action: LA's.

21.6.2 Site Safeguard and Management

GS2. Ensure management of all existing sites incorporates management for this species with other conservation priorities and interests, by 1999.

Waterford Heath - Prepare and implement management plan. Introduce low - moderate intensity grazing management.

Aldbury Nowers - Manage site to increase area and improve quality of chalk grassland.

Frogmore Pit - Investigate management requirements and implement.

Action: HMWT, GH, BC, Redland Aggregates.

GS3. Encourage restoration of suitable breeding habitat on sites within former range, where there is potential for re-establishing viable networks of populations, by 2005.

Action: BC, HMWT, CMS.

21.6.3 Species Management and Protection

GS4. Investigate the need for re-introductions, by 2002. If proven, prepare a plan for strategic re-introductions of Grizzled Skipper, based on accepted scientific criteria, into networks of suitable existing and restored habitat, by 2007.

Action: BC, HERC.

21.6.4 Advisory

GS5. Ensure all landowners and managers of potential re-colonisation and re-introduction sites are offered advice on habitat management, by 2005.

Action: CMS, HMWT, BC.

GS6. If new colonies are discovered, ensure landowners and managers are offered advice on habitat management, within 1 year.

Action: CMS, HMWT, BC.

21.6.5 Research and Monitoring

GS7. Search all post 1970 known sites for Grizzled Skipper, over next 2 years, and update county distribution map to ascertain the status of this species in Hertfordshire.

Action: BC.

GS8. Monitor all populations annually, either as part of a transect walk or through counts of peak numbers.

Action: BC, HMWT.

GS9. Identify potentially suitable, unoccupied habitats, including former known sites, within 10-20 km of existing populations, by 2002.

Action: BC, HERC.

GS10. From the above information, identify Key Sites, within the former range, by 2002, for concentrating habitat management and restoration advice and effort, in preparation for natural colonisation or planned (re-)introduction.

Action: BC, HERC.

GS11. Identify potentially suitable, unoccupied habitats, including former known sites, greater than 20 km away from existing populations, by 2007.

Action: BC, HERC.

21.6.6 Communication and Publicity

GS12. Encourage butterfly recording and monitoring through the Millennium Atlas project.

Action: BC.

GS13. At Waterford Pits, encourage the local community to monitor the numbers of Grizzled Skipper, from 1998.

Action: BC, GH, HMWT.