

SPECIES ACTION PLAN FOR GRIZZLED SKIPPER AND DINGY SKIPPER

Authors: Michael Walker & Dr Alan Birch, Butterfly Conservation East Midlands Branch

*Lead Agency: Butterfly Conservation
c/o Dr Alan Birch
24 Grandfield Crescent
Radcliffe-on-Trent
Nottinghamshire
NG12 1AN*

Most recent update: May 1998

Current Status

The dingy skipper (*Erynnis tages*) occurs throughout England, with its stronghold being the Midlands and southern counties. It feeds mainly on birds-foot trefoil. The grizzled skipper (*Pyrgus malvae*) does not venture as far north, stopping at the approximate level of the Humber Estuary. Its main food plants are wild strawberry, creeping cinquefoil, tormentil and silverweed. Both species, therefore, rely on unimproved grasslands managed by low intensity methods, and both prefer areas where there are patches of bare earth. Disused railway lines provide ideal conditions.

In Nottinghamshire both species have experienced a decline. Because they are both found in similar habitat and in some instances at the same site, they been grouped together in one action plan.

Using the criteria established by Butterfly Conservation, these species are categorised as 'High Priority Regional Important'. This is because:

- a) there has been a significant decline in recent decades.
- b) there are less than 30 colonies remaining.

The last atlas of butterfly distribution recorded that dingy skipper was found in 15 10km squares in Nottinghamshire between 1970 and 1988. The grizzled skipper was found in 10 squares during the same period. Records from the Nottinghamshire Biological and Geological Records Centre and Butterfly Conservation's East Midlands Branch show that since 1980 the dingy skipper has been noted in 7 10km squares and the grizzled in 4. Recent recording has seen a further downward trend in dingy skipper records.

The majority of colonies of both species in Nottinghamshire are found on disused railway lines. The old lines west of the County seem to be favoured by the dingy skipper whilst grizzled skipper has its strongest colonies on the lines east and south-east of Bingham.

Threats

The main factors currently affecting these species in Nottinghamshire are:

- Loss of suitable habitat in disused railway lines to development, including path and cycle path construction.
- Lack of management of sites leading to them becoming overgrown, causing larval food plants to decline.
- Small size, isolation, and hence vulnerability of colonies.

Current Initiatives - Examples

- The mapping of all butterfly species will be completed in 1999, as part of the Butterflies for the New Millennium project, ready for publication in 2000.
- Many private and public landowners manage areas of actual or potential value for these species. They have an important role to play in the implementation of this plan.

Targets

- *Establish a baseline against which trends in the populations can be monitored by 2000.*
- *Bring all current sites supporting the species into appropriate management by 2005.*
- *Increase the distributions of dingy and grizzled skipper to 1970-88 levels by 2010.*

Proposed Action

Site Safeguard and Management

1) Protect all known sites supporting the species from damaging development.

Action: Local Authorities (LAs).

2) Determine ownership of all known sites for either species and inform landowners of their conservation importance.

Action: Butterfly Conservation (BC).

3) Seek to establish and implement management plans for all sites that hold dingy or grizzled skipper, and to encourage the sensitive management of potential sites for colonisation. Consider also the management of land adjacent to these sites, in particular the potential for spray drift of pesticides or herbicides.

Action: BC, LAs, Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust (NWT), British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV), English Nature (EN).

4) Work towards the designation of at least one site as a Local Nature Reserve or Site of Importance for Nature Conservation.

Action: LAs.

Future Research and Monitoring

5) Continue the recording of both species in the County after the end of the Millennium Project.

Action: BC, Notts Biological and Geological Records Centre (NBGRC).

6) Establish at least two transect walks which take in a known colony of either species, in order to measure year on year variations in population size. Consider revisiting old sites with potential for recolonisation to look for new populations.

Action: BC.

Communications and Publicity

7) Promote, by publicising the plight of dingy and grizzled skipper, the worth of disused railway lines as a valuable habitat for wildlife. Consider producing a leaflet for site managers on management for skippers.

Action: BC, Biodiversity Action Group.

What You Can Do

- Report all sightings of dingy and grizzled skipper to the Notts Biological and Geological Records Centre at Wollaton Hall.
- Volunteer for practical conservation work with BTCV or Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust on sites supporting, or with the potential to support, dingy or grizzled skipper.