



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 two 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 un-shaded 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 & 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 reseeding 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, actions and targets

Objective 1: To maintain and enhance the current populations of Grizzled Skipper to halt their rapid decline

Target: Implement appropriate habitat management at key existing sites (Aldbury Nowers, Waterford Heath, Frogmore Pit, Tring Park and Broxbourne Woods) by 2007

Action code	Action	Target start date	Target end date	Lead partner	Other partners
GS/A/1.1	Ensure all sites containing Grizzled Skipper are recognised and protected in Local Plans at next review		As reviewed	HBRC	LA's
GS/A/1.2	Ensure Grizzled Skipper sites are protected through the development control process			HBRC	LA's, HMWT
GS/A/1.3	Target existing site landowners to see if Grizzled Skipper are catered for in current management plans	Jan 2004	Jan 2005	BC	WT, HCC, EN, HMWT, FWAG, CMS
GS/A/1.4	Offer site owners help and advice on appropriate habitat management for Grizzled Skipper conservation, including writing of plan and continued survey work	Jan 2004	Jan 2005	BC	CMS, HMWT, FWAG
GS/A/1.5	Ensure site management plans include positive management for Grizzled Skipper	Jan 2004	Jan 2005	BC	HMWT, WT, Gwk, HCC
GS/A/1.6	Implement management prescriptions for Grizzled Skipper on the existing key sites	Jan 2005	Ongoing	Site managers, BC	
GS/A/1.7	Monitor all populations using standard comparable methods and/or through counts of peak numbers		Ongoing	BC	

Objective 2: Restore suitable breeding habitat within the range of existing populations to allow for natural re-colonisation

Target: Identify suitable sites and implement appropriate habitat management by 2007

Action code	Action	Target start date	Target end date	Lead partner	Other partners
GS/A/2.1	Prioritise potential re-colonisation sites using the Hertfordshire Grizzled Skipper Survey reports as baseline data, searching for potential sites in a 10-20 km radius from existing sites. Check search area	Jan 2005	Jan 2006	BC, HBRC	
GS/A/2.2	Identify and contact site owners regarding appropriate habitat management	Jan 2005	Jan 2006	BC	CMS, HMWT, FWAG
GS/A/2.3	Where appropriate, ensure site management plans include positive management for Grizzled Skipper	Jan 2006	Jan 2007	BC	Land managers
GS/A/2.4	Monitor sites	Jan 2005	Ongoing	BC	
GS/A/2.5	Implement appropriate habitat management	Jan 2007	Ongoing	BC	Land managers

Objective 3: To raise awareness of the needs of the Grizzled Skipper to key target audiences such as land managers and general public

Target: Run one public event annually and publish one article annually

Action code	Action	Target start date	Target end date	Lead partner	Other partners
GS/A/3.1	Write articles about appropriate habitat management for Grizzled Skipper for relevant specialist publications	Jan 2004	Ongoing	BC	HMWT
GS/A/3.2	Publicise and run field trips for local people to specific sites to learn about Grizzled Skippers		Annually	BC	
GS/A/3.3	Continue to produce Grizzled Skipper annual reports		Annually	BC	

Relevant Action Plans:

Hertfordshire Plans

Woodland; Grassland and Heathland

National Plans

Lowland calcareous grassland; Lowland meadows; Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland Habitat Description; Boundary and linear features Habitat Description

Abbreviations (Partners)

BC – Butterfly Conservation, Hertfordshire & Middlesex Branch

Gwk – Groundwork Hertfordshire

HBRC – Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre

HCC – Hertfordshire County Council

HMWT – Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust

LA's – Local Authorities

WSP – Wildlife Sites Partnership (HMWT, HBRC, CMS, FWAG, EA, EN, DEFRA, Chilterns AONB)

WT – Woodland Trust

Contact:

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