

REPORT OF THE GROUP MANAGER PLANNING**PROJECT – “ENHANCING AND RECONNECTING GRIZZLED SKIPPER
HABITAT ACROSS SOUTH NOTTINGHAMSHIRE”****Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide an update on an externally-funded project benefiting a species of butterfly called the Grizzled Skipper, being delivered through the County Council's Conservation Team in 2011/12 and 2012/13.

Information and Advice

2. Under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, local authorities have a duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Section 40(1) of Act states that *'every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.'* Section 40(3) clarifies the duty by stating that *'conserving biodiversity includes, in relation to a living organism or type of habitat, restoring or enhancing a population or habitat.'*
3. As part of its work to meet this duty, Nottinghamshire County Council, in partnership with the Nottinghamshire Biodiversity Action Group (Notts BAG) and Butterfly Conservation (East Midlands branch), applied for funding in 2011 from the SITA Trust, an organisation which distributes funding through the Landfill Communities Fund (LCF). The LCF allows Landfill Operators to 'offset' a percentage of the landfill tax that they must pay to the Government on every ton of waste that they dispose of in a landfill site by giving a proportion of it to organisations who deliver environmental objectives, instead of paying it as tax to Government.
4. The County Council was successful in its bid and secured £66,000. The purpose of the funding is to deliver a project entitled “Enhancing and Reconnecting Grizzled Skipper Habitat Across South Nottinghamshire”, with an additional £10,000 of match funding awarded by the County Council's Local Improvement Scheme, and small contributions made by Rushcliffe Borough Council and Butterfly Conservation.
5. The Grizzled Skipper is a species of butterfly which occurs in areas of flowery grassland containing plants upon which its larvae feeds (principally creeping cinquefoil, wild strawberry and agrimony). It is identified as a national conservation priority (due to its listing on the UK Biodiversity Action Plan), having undergone a significant reduction in both its national distribution and population size. In Nottinghamshire, it now occurs only in small parts of Rushcliffe and southern Newark and Sherwood (and this area forms the northern edge of the

species' natural range in England), where it is largely restricted to disused railway lines and other adjacent sites such as former gypsum quarries, in four discrete areas;

- Newark to Kilvington disused railway (Sustrans Route) and adjacent sites
 - Railway lines (active and disused) west and south-east of Bingham
 - Disused railway line at Langar and Barnstone and adjacent sites
 - Active railway line at East Leake and a nearby site
6. The first three areas form part of a larger network of sites, which was previously much more extensive and better connected. The fourth area, around East Leake, is extremely isolated and very vulnerable, without actual or potential linkages to any other populations. Most of the sites from which the species is now recorded are subject to little, if any, management, and are particularly prone to scrub encroachment. Without active management, there is a high probability that Grizzled Skippers would be lost from a number of the sites where they currently occur, and there is a risk of the species becoming extinct in the county altogether.
7. The project is being delivered by Nottinghamshire's Biodiversity Officer (working for the Nottinghamshire Biodiversity Action Group and hosted by Nottinghamshire County Council), in partnership with the East Midland's branch of Butterfly Conservation, and aims to undertake works to benefit the Grizzled Skipper on approximately 18 sites, which are in a mixture of private and public ownership (most with some level of public access).
8. There are two main elements to the project; the first is to maintain and enhance areas of existing habitat used by (or with the potential to be used by) Grizzled Skipper, and to create patches of new habitat within sites. The second is to increase the connectivity between sites (by creating favourable habitat for the butterfly to move through), to encourage the interchange of individuals between sites, and to allow the colonisation of new sites.
9. Specifically, the project involves:
- Clearance of encroaching scrub to maintain flowery grassland areas used by, or with the potential to be used by, Grizzled Skippers. This will include opening up sunny 'rides' along densely vegetated sections of disused railway line.
 - Creation of new habitat through the formation of scrapes in areas of enriched grassland and ruderal vegetation and the creation of low banks of railway ballast, both of which will encourage growth of the larval foodplants.
 - Transplantation of larval foodplant (principally creeping cinquefoil) from areas where it grows profusely into new habitat areas.
 - Co-ordination of surveys to encourage better monitoring of Grizzled Skipper populations at sites in the project area.
 - Co-ordination of volunteers to undertake additional habitat management works and other site enhancements.
 - Delivering training courses, to raise awareness of the species amongst local people and to encourage the recording of Grizzled Skippers.
10. Since the start of 2012, work has been completed at seven sites. This has been undertaken by contractors, and consisted mainly of removing scrub that is invading the open habitat favoured by Grizzled Skippers. Early indications are that this was successful, with Grizzled Skippers being recorded in a number of areas of restored habitat.

11. In order to co-ordinate surveying of site, an informal recording group was set up via email, which was very successful, generating a total of 94 individual Grizzled Skipper records at 22 sites (including several new ones). Some very notable counts were made in what seems to be an exceptional year for this species, and the data will be invaluable when targeting future work and assessing the success of the project.
12. Two training days were also run, aimed at local people. These consisted of an indoor session run by Butterfly Conservation, providing background information about the Grizzled Skipper (their ecology, conservation and identification), and an afternoon field trip. Unfortunately, the weather was unsuitable on both occasions and no Grizzled Skippers were seen, but the courses were a success nevertheless as records were forthcoming from a number of people who attended.
13. Work (to be delivered over the autumn/winter period of 2012-13) will take place at a further 11 or so sites, again focussing on scrub clearance, and this is currently in the process of being organised. A major element of this will be take place on the disused railway line between Cotham and Kilvington, which will see several isolated colonies re-linked, and new areas of habitat created.
14. In addition, three volunteer work parties are planned for the winter period, to carry out additional enhancements at some of the sites (e.g. burning excess brash and cutting down additional areas of scrub).

Other Options Considered

15. Not applicable.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

16. The County Council has a duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity. By successfully attracting external funding and through partnership working with conservation organisations, landowners and local people, the County Council is fulfilling its duty to conserve a national conservation priority species.

Statutory and Policy Implications

17. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) To note progress in the delivery of an externally-funded project benefiting the county's wildlife and helping the County Council to meet its duty to conserve biodiversity. A final report will be provided upon completion of the project.

Sally Gill
Group Manager Planning

**For any enquiries about this report please contact: Nick Crouch, Senior Practitioner
Nature Conservation (0115 969 6520)**

Constitutional Comments

18. This report is for noting only by the Culture Committee and no legal issues arise at present.
(NAB 5.10.12).

Financial Comments (DJK 04.10.12)

19. The contents of this report are duly noted; there are no financial implications.

Background Papers

None

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

Balderton	Councillor Keith Walker
Farndon and Muskham	Councillor Sue Saddington
Bingham	Councillor Martin Suthers
Cotgrave	Councillor Richard Butler
Soar Valley	Councillor Lynn Sykes