



**PRESS  
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## Grassland butterflies plummet across Europe

Butterflies normally found on grassland are in steep decline across Europe, pointing to a huge loss of European biodiversity.

This is the conclusion of a new study by Butterfly Conservation Europe based on data from 3,000 sites in 15 countries.

The Grassland Butterfly Indicator shows that the populations of 17 butterfly species have declined by over 70% in the last 20 years. Butterflies are sensitive environmental indicators; alerting us to underlying problems with the environment. Grasslands are a vital habitat for European wildlife and support a huge range of plants and insects. If butterfly numbers are falling, inevitably other wildlife is also in decline.

The losses are thought to have been caused by rapidly changing agricultural practices in Europe's diverse semi-natural grasslands. Such grasslands have been created by traditional livestock grazing and hay-making over centuries of human occupation since the last ice-age. This management creates a wonderfully flower-rich breeding habitat for butterflies and many other insects. However, in recent decades these traditional grasslands have deteriorated, meaning loss due to agricultural intensification in some regions and abandonment in others.

The underlying forces behind the losses are rapid economic and social changes, which have led to the intensification of better land and the abandonment of land with poorer soils and in remote locations. Abandonment is thought to be the most serious cause of losses in mountain regions and eastern Europe, while lowland areas have suffered most from intensification.

Dr Martin Warren, Chief Executive of the charity Butterfly Conservation (UK) said: "The results show the dramatic and continuing loss of biodiversity in European grasslands. We urgently need a change in EU agricultural policy that favours High Nature Value farming rather than over-intensification as at present. The results would be better for the environment and better for rural communities who are struggling to survive under the current system of support which favours larger more intensive producers."

Butterflies are one of the best monitored groups of wildlife in Europe and Butterfly Conservation Europe is pressing for them to be adopted as agricultural indicators in the next round of CAP reform in 2013.

ENDS

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Pic Cap 1: Large Blue – Jim Asher

## Notes for Editors

**Butterfly Conservation Europe** is an umbrella organisation aimed at stimulating and co-ordinating the conservation of butterflies, moths and their habitats across Europe. It has a network of 37 partners in 35 countries. [www.bc-europe.eu](http://www.bc-europe.eu)

### Grassland Indicator

The Indicator is based on butterfly counts made at 3,000 localities in 15 countries across Europe. The data are based on weekly counts of adults along a fixed route, known as a transect. The Indicator is calculated from individual trends of 17 characteristic grassland species that are fairly widespread across Europe. They include 14 species found in the UK: Dingy Skipper, Lulworth Skipper, Large Skipper, Orange-tip, Small Copper, Large Blue, Common Blue, Chalkhill Blue, Adonis Blue, Small Blue, Marsh Fritillary, Small Heath, Meadow Brown, and Wall.

The indicator is based on the effort of thousands of volunteer recorders and has been produced with funding from the European Environment Agency.

### Photos

**Wall:** declining in every country with overall losses running at over 72% in just 20 years. Population decrease in the UK is 65% since 1976.

**Lulworth Skipper:** Declining in most countries Found only along the south Dorset coast, but declining rapidly across Europe. Numbers in Britain fell by 87% in the last 10 years (data from UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme).

**Dingy Skipper:** Declined by 37% across Europe in the last 20 years. Its distribution in the UK has declined by almost half in the last 2 decades.

**Large Blue:** globally endangered species declining rapidly in every country except Britain where it has been successfully re-introduced. It became extinct here in 1979, but it has been re-introduced to over 30 sites in south-west England. It needs extensive grazing of its grassland habitat to maintain the correct ant species, which its caterpillars feed on for much of the year.