

Support for chequered skipper conservation under the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP)

Introduction

This technical guidance note is aimed at landowners, managers and their advisors who are considering undertaking woodland management for chequered skipper under [SRDP](#). It provides information on the most suitable management to benefit the species and how this management might be achieved and assessed under SRDP.

The chequered skipper is a UKBAP Priority species. It is also one of the key woodland species identified for action by Forestry Commission Scotland in the [Scottish Forestry Strategy](#) 2006.

Following its extinction in England in 1976, within the UK the chequered skipper only occurs within a 25-mile radius of Fort William. This very restricted range is due to the mild winters and warm, damp summers that are a feature of Lochaber. Forestry Commission Scotland has published a [Species Action Note](#) setting out conservation needs and priorities in more depth than is included in this note.

Species information

The [chequered skipper](#) is a species of damp woodland edges or the open spaces within damp woodlands. It requires sunny, sheltered sites, usually south-facing, as both the adult butterfly and its caterpillar require a warm, almost humid micro-climate. Sites are usually below 200m.

The caterpillar's main food plant is purple moor-grass. The adult butterflies are only active in warm or sunny weather from the third week of May until the end of June. They often congregate at sunny sheltered locations with lots of nectar, especially bugle, bluebell and marsh thistle where males establish and defend territories. Females, however, are more wide-ranging; possibly over several kilometres and lay their eggs whilst passing through suitable habitat.

The chequered skipper lives in low-density colonies over large areas. Populations are more sustainable if sites are linked, enabling an exchange of adults between neighbouring colonies. It is therefore essential that sites are managed on a landscape scale; the management of small isolated sites is unsustainable in the long-term

Generic management for chequered skipper

The main threat to the butterfly is inappropriate management with the consequent loss and isolation of colonies. Good forest design and operational practice will often benefit chequered skipper through the creation or maintenance of suitable linked open ground.

Chequered skipper habitat often deteriorates as woodland succession advances. Management therefore has to be planned carefully to ensure that suitable habitat is always present at any given time, and that effective networks are maintained/created.

Grazing management

Many colonies are maintained by extensive grazing which keeps sites flower rich and prevents them becoming too rank. This is best achieved either by: all year round light grazing; or seasonal grazing with a reduced spring/summer stocking rate; or a 2-3 month grazing break sometime between April and July. Such a regime will also lessen the need for regular scrub clearance by keeping tree regeneration in check.

If grazing levels are too high then livestock is often forced into the damper areas to feed on purple-moor grass, thus potentially damaging breeding habitat. At sites where there is no or insufficient livestock grazing, and/or deer numbers are low, then rotational scrub control may be required.

Grants for woodland grazing are not currently available under SRDP but suitable grazing can be undertaken under SRDP under the following options, all of which require an agreed Grazing Plan;

Management of ancient wood pasture

Only sites (or candidate sites) listed in the "Inventory of Ancient Wood Pasture in Scotland" are eligible for this option. This is a five year commitment, paying £105/ha/year for in-bye land and £50/ha/year for rough grazings.

Scrub and tall herb communities

There is a requirement to maintain an appropriate balance and mosaic between scrub and open habitat. This is a five year commitment, paying £94/ha/year.

Management of habitat mosaics

This option is only eligible on in-bye ground. This is a five year commitment, paying £104/ha/year.

Management of species-rich grassland

This option is eligible only on in-bye ground. This is a five year commitment, paying £111/ha/year.

Scrub control

The maintenance and creation of open space is very important to maintain colonies and preserve/create links between them. In the absence of grazing and browsing from either deer or livestock this is best achieved through carefully planned and targeted scrub control. Ideally scrub should be cleared once 50% of glades or open space is covered with scrub over 1.5m high. Scrub clearance should be cyclical, occurring on a rotation of 3-10 years dependant on site conditions. At large sites the clearance of scrub should be staggered to produce open space at different stages of succession.

Ideally rides and paths should run east-west as such rides have a greater proportion of warmer south-facing edges. Around 25-30m wide is the perfect width for them still to be sunny, yet sheltered. The inclusion of scalloped bays (c. 25m across) at intervals along the south facing edge will provide additional sheltered sunny habitat.

Wayleaves through woodland often support chequered skipper colonies by providing suitable sheltered, open habitat, and their linear nature means that they can act as corridors to link neighbouring colonies. The management recommendations previously outlined for paths and rides are also relevant to wayleaves.

Glades should be at least 30m wide in sunny sheltered locations but not too big that they are too open and hence provide little shelter.

Scrub control can be funded under SRDP under the following options;

Woodland Improvement Grant

Aim is to improve existing woodlands, especially habitats and species that are a priority in the UKBAP and for environmental improvements through restructuring. This can be achieved under one or more of five outcomes:

Long-term forest planning – This requires a framework for specific woodland management actions that will enhance the environmental value of the woodland through the production of a 20 year strategic plan. This receives a payment rate of £20/ha for the first 200ha and £5/ha thereafter with a

minimum payment of £400 and a maximum payment of £15,000. [Further guidance](#) is on the Forestry Commission Scotland website.

[Reducing deer impact in woodlands](#) – This provides support for reducing and maintaining deer numbers at levels that prevent damage to trees and important woodland habitats. This may be important for keeping open space within woodlands open. This receives a payment of £30/ha/year and requires the production of a Deer Management Plan.

[Improving woodland habitats and species](#)- particularly UKBAP species. This provides means to respace regeneration, pre commercial, non-commercial and small scale thinning. This attracts payment rates of between £105 - £210/ha and requires the production of a Management Plan to show how BAP species and habitats will benefit.

[Improving even-aged woodland for biodiversity](#) – This provides an opportunity to design the restocking of felled areas to benefit BAP species and habitats. This receives a payment of £150 - £500/hectare and ideally proposals should be outlined in the Forest Plan.

[Improving non-woodland habitats](#). This allows 20% of the area to be non-woodland (but must be integral to the woodland). This outcome allows a number of options that would benefit chequered skipper including removal of seedling trees, chipping/mulching of tree debris and removal of thicket-stage tree crops between 3-6m high to enhance biodiversity. A management plan must set out your aims and the rationale for the proposed operations.

Other woodland management

The SRDP also supports other measures that under the right circumstances will benefit chequered skipper.

[Sustainable management of forests](#)

Aims to support sustainable management of forests and woodlands of high environmental value to protect and enhance biodiversity. This option supports net costs over a period of 10 years, subject to a review after 5 years. Payment rates are dependant upon the management undertaken.

[Woodland creation](#)

Aims to create new woods that can deliver a wide range of objectives including developing woodland habitat networks to improve biodiversity. This option supports a single payment per hectare for initial tree planting and an annual payment for 5 years. Rates of payment are dependant upon the type of woodland being established.

[Control of invasive non-native species](#)

Under this option *Rhododendron ponticum* can be controlled where this will help protect designated sites, Biodiversity Action Plan priority species and habitats. Payment rates are variable.

Bracken Control

Bracken control is often required to prevent excessive encroachment particularly into nectaring areas. Breeding areas are often less vulnerable as they are damper and thus less prone to bracken invasion. Bracken control must be carefully planned, particularly at sites where the pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly, which is reliant on bracken, is also known to occur. For more information on pearl-bordered fritillary, (a UKBAP Priority Species) and its management see the FCS Technical Note on support for pearl-bordered fritillary conservation.

Before any bracken control is undertaken an assessment must be undertaken to ensure that suitable pearl-bordered fritillary habitat is not targeted. Sites are best assessed in the spring before the bracken fronds have unfurled. Suitable habitat is often characterised by violets growing in shallow bracken litter (<15 cm depth) and low to medium bracken density (<c. 20 fronds m²), in sunny, sheltered locations. Bracken control should not be undertaken in areas of currently suitable pearl-bordered fritillary habitat.

Bracken control can be funded under SRDP under the following option:

[Bracken management programme for habitat enhancement](#)

You must prepare and implement a systematic programme of treatment and follow-up actions, as specified within a Bracken Management Plan. This is a five year commitment that attracts a payment rate of £28ha/year. In addition the cost of primary treatment of bracken is covered (see below).

Capital works

Funding for a number of [capital works](#) that may assist chequered skipper is available under SRDP. Many of these costs are available in addition to the management costs outlined above. Costs for these claims must be fully justified.

Bracken control

- [Primary Treatment of Bracken](#) - £200/ha of infested land

Rhododendron eradication

- [Manual Eradication of Rhododendron](#) - £3500/ha of infested land
- [Mechanised Eradication of Rhododendron](#) - £850/ha of infested land
- [Chemical Eradication of Rhododendron](#) - £850/ha of infested land

Scrub control

- [Eradication of scrubby/woody vegetation](#) – Light cover £600/ha, intermediate cover £850/ha and heavy cover £1250/ha
- [Removal from site of the cut scrub/woody vegetation](#) – Light cover £500/ha, intermediate cover £1050/ha and heavy cover £1450/ha

[Measures to aid stock management](#)

- This includes a range of measures including assistance for fencing, restoring dykes and providing drinking water for livestock.

[Small scale tree planting](#)

- Small scale tree planting (on a site <0.25ha) - £2 per tree or shrub

[Assessment of applications](#)

SRDP applications are assessed against a number of categories, under three group headings. To have a chance of funding, the application must be able to score 'high' for as many categories as possible. The following list shows how it might be possible to score 'high' for each category, but each case will be judged on its merits by the appropriate Case Officer.

Group 1: Scale of Contribution to Regional Priorities and National Targets

- [Quality](#) – Scored high in Highland and Argyll RPAC areas where chequered skipper is a regional priority.
- [Quantity](#) – Scored high if you can demonstrate that your application '*intends to commit as much of your available resources as is feasible or reasonable, and you have not simply chosen to do the minimum*'. In the case of chequered skipper it is therefore important to show how you will be managing for the butterfly across the entire site. This may mean not only creating/maintaining suitable breeding habitat,

but also making the whole site more 'porous' to chequered skipper thus encouraging links with neighbouring colonies.

- [Collaboration](#) – Scored high if you can work in partnership with other applicants thus making a greater contribution. This is vital for chequered skipper where conservation effort is required on a landscape scale.
- [Integration](#) – Scored high if you can demonstrate an integrated programme of biodiversity enhancement through two or more options e.g. by creating a joined up network of suitable habitat for chequered skipper.
- [Multiple Outcomes](#) – Scored high if you can demonstrate that your proposals meets more than one regional priority i.e. biodiversity, landscape, climate change, etc.
- [Contribution to National Targets](#) – Scored high if work is undertaken to bring (or maintain) a designated site into favourable condition, or includes proposals for woodland expansion to mitigate the effects of climate change. The latter may be useful in creating more sheltered links between neighbouring colonies in exposed areas.

Group 2: Value for Money

- [Additionality](#) – Scored high if you can demonstrate a greater contribution to the regional priority by improving upon the minimum standards in the options guidance. This could be achieved by liaison with Butterfly Conservation Scotland (BCS) and the implementation of site-specific advice.
- [Added Value](#) – Scored high if you can demonstrate your proposals secure or enhance any existing activity, e.g. application is a continuation of a previous woodland scheme such as WGS or SFGS.
- [Long-term Benefit](#) – Scored high for any activities whose benefits will last beyond the term of the current scheme. This could include any measures for suitable woodland establishment or the creation of open ground that will persist to benefit chequered skipper beyond the life of the application.

Group 3: Management of Risk

- [Meeting Demand](#) – Scored high for woodland management to favour chequered skipper, as the butterfly is a UKBAP species.
- [Minimising Impacts](#) – Scored high if you can demonstrate you have taken on board the advice offered by your Case Officer, other specialist advisors (such as BCS) or comments made through any consultation process your proposal was subject to. Need to identify negative impacts and mitigate against them to score a high.
- [Demonstrating Feasibility](#) – Scored high if you can provide evidence that the proposal can be successfully completed within the specified timescales, to the agreed standards. Proposals for chequered skipper have therefore to be demonstrably deliverable.

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