

# The Denge Wood Project

## Enhancing habitats for wildlife



Denge Wood, near Canterbury in Kent, is home to the rare and beautiful Duke of Burgundy, a butterfly that has seen a sharp decline in numbers over the last 20 years. Favouring woodlands with sunny coppiced clearings and grassy areas, the Duke of Burgundy exists in three separate colonies in Denge Wood, jointly owned by the Forestry Commission, the Woodland Trust and a private individual. The project seeks to improve butterfly habitats through a targeted forestry management plan. The creation of a 'wildlife corridor' will link the colonies, ensuring the survival of this nationally-treasured butterfly, in one of the last remaining strongholds in South England.

### objectives

- To connect isolated colonies of the Duke of Burgundy butterfly on Woodland Trust and Forestry Commission sites, separated by one kilometre of privately owned woodland, (retaining these colonies whilst new habitats are created.)
- To improve habitat and breeding areas specifically for the Duke of Burgundy.
- To improve woodland/open space ratio in area.
- To enhance the structural diversity of the woodland and increase the availability of butterfly habitat.

### actions

- Creation of a strategic wildlife corridor measuring 1km by 40m to link three isolated colonies of the Duke of Burgundy.
- Woodland corridor and track-side coppicing, and clearance of invading scrub, undertaken to diversify habitat.
- Annual 'cut and collect' of re-growth along corridor by 'Rytec' (specialist machinery that cuts and collects forage on sensitive sites).

### achievements

- An increasing abundance of wildflowers including primrose (*primula veris*), the Duke of Burgundy's principal foodplant, and locally/nationally rare orchids.
- Since the start of this project the Duke of Burgundy has continued to colonise new areas of Bonsai Bank (Woodland Trust) and looks set to continue this trend.
- More butterfly species present along the corridor.
- The number of adults recorded during the flight period continues to rise.
- Successful partnership of three separate parties (Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust and private woodland owner) in landscape-scale woodland management.
- The success of the project has led to the initiation of other landscape-scale projects for butterflies (e.g. the Rother Woods Project).
- The habitat will gradually mature into suitable habitat and natural dispersal will take place, further strengthening the Duke of Burgundy in the Denge Wood complex.

## background

Denge Wood is located eight miles south west of Canterbury and is one of the few remaining locations in England that contains populations of the Duke of Burgundy butterfly (the Lake District and North Yorkshire are the other two strongholds). The 420ha Denge Wood is a mix of native broadleaf species, sweet chestnut coppice and planted conifer. Former chalk grassland provides an important and interesting habitat for the three colonies of Duke of Burgundy. Two colonies live on the Woodland Trust site and one on the Forestry Commission site, separated by a swathe of privately owned woodland.

The Duke of Burgundy (*hamearis lucina*), lives in small colonies of up to 20-25 individuals. Once locally common in open sunny woodlands in the South East, it has shown a rapid and worrying decline, due primarily to the reduction in coppicing practices. Over a period of 21 years (1976-97) populations were recorded as having declined by 43%. The Butterfly Conservation Action Plan for South East England (2000) identifies the Duke of Burgundy as a priority species for conservation; it is also a 'proposed priority species' under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP).

A management plan, written in consultation with Butterfly Conservation, guided the partners in a targeted project to enhance and extend butterfly habitats. Under the Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS) Management Plan the private owner was able to claim assistance for works planned over a five-year period.

The continuation of combined-ownership working will help to safeguard the future of the Duke of Burgundy by providing and maintaining the habitats that sustain it.

## quotes

*'Excellent job! The Duke of Burgundy was one of the most threatened species but it did very well last year. The work allowed primrose to grow – an important food source. Very well thought through.'*  
Peter Gaye, local naturalist.

*'Given the national decline of the Duke of Burgundy, Butterfly Conservation (BC) welcomed this exciting project. It was particularly pleasing for BC to be consulted throughout the project. The Forestry Commission must be congratulated on their careful handling of this rare and charming butterfly.'* Peter Kirby, BC.

## partners

English Nature  
Private woodland owner  
Woodland Trust

## funding

<b>Total Project:</b>	<b>£37,222</b>
Forestry Commission:	£17,571
Private woodland owner	£18,688
Woodland Trust	£963

## lessons learnt

- Keep Woodland Grant Scheme Management Plan applications simple and open-ended to maintain flexibility, particularly on sensitive sites with multiple ownership.
- Regular contact with private stakeholders maintains enthusiasm.
- Partnership working has worked well on this site due to good local knowledge and commitment.