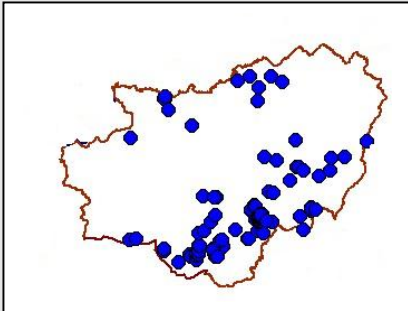


CARMARTHENSHIRE LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

MARSH FRITILLARY/ EURODRYAS AURINIA



Conservation objectives:

- Prevent any further loss due to development on suitable habitat.
- Through appropriate management ensure that 50% of known sites support larval webs annually.
- Extend, where appropriate, the range and distribution of the butterfly within the county.

What you can do to help:

- If you have rhos pasture, seek advice on its management

Further information:

www.butterfly-conservation.org
www.carmarthenshire.gov.uk

The marsh fritillary was once known as the greasy fritillary because the undersides of its forewings are shiny.



Ecology

The marsh fritillary is a beautiful butterfly once fairly widespread the UK but it has declined in range by over 60%. Adults fly from mid-May until late June when they lay their eggs on the devil's-bit scabious plant. The caterpillars live communally on the plant feeding on its leaves within a silken web. In winter the caterpillars hibernate deep in grass tussocks. In spring they feed and bask in the sun; they pupate from late April.

The marsh fritillary requires a network of large, closely connected areas of tussocky grasses and devil's-bit scabious that will support a number of individual colonies. Poor habitat management, a parasitic wasp and bad weather all threaten the survival of these colonies so nearby populations of the butterfly and suitable habitat are vital to enable natural recolonisation if a colony dies out, especially as the butterfly rarely flies very far.

In Wales the butterfly mainly occurs on damp tussocky grasslands – rhôs pasture. Careful low-intensity grazing by cattle and/or ponies is needed to create a patchwork of short vegetation and long, tussocky grasses. Sheep usually destroy this habitat through close grazing and usually eat the food plant as well.

Distribution in Carmarthenshire

Loss of suitably managed habitat has seen the marsh fritillary decline dramatically in the UK. Wales is really important for the species. The Mynydd Mawr area near Cross Hands has one of the most extensive and important populations in Wales and is of European significance.

Legal status

The butterfly is protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). It is illegal to kill, disturb, injure, capture or possess a marsh fritillary, and its place of shelter or protection is protected against intentional and reckless acts of damage, destruction or obstruction.

Why has it declined?

- * Loss of habitat to development or agricultural improvement.
- * Increasing fragmentation and isolation of habitats.
- * Inappropriate habitat management (neglect, under-grazing, over-grazing or damage from grazing with sheep).

What is being done locally

- * A Special Area of Conservation for the butterfly has been designated in the Mynydd Mawr area, which is of European importance.
- * A project officer in the Mynydd Mawr area works with local landowners to conserve the butterfly.
- * A number of sites are managed under agri-environment schemes

Where you can look for Marsh Fritillary

There are two nature reserves in Carmarthenshire with marsh fritillaries [Rhos Cefn Bryn and Caeau Ffos Fach]. Visit in late May and June for the best chance of seeing them flying.