Grizzled Skipper
Pyrgus malvae
DRAFT Species Action Plan

1. Introduction
The grizzled skipper has declined in both occurrence (-53%) and abundance (-37%) between 1976 and 2014. Many remaining grizzled skipper colonies are on brownfield sites, where they are threatened by successional change, redevelopment and landscaping. Conserving the butterfly in these habitats poses a considerable challenge. The grizzled skipper was listed as a UK BAP priority species and subsequently included in Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006.

2. Current Status
2.1 Ecology and habitat requirements
The grizzled skipper is a spring butterfly of sparsely vegetated habitats. Its rapid buzzing flight can make it difficult to follow, but it stops regularly either to perch on a prominent twig or to feed on nectar rich flowers. It can then be identified quite easily by the black and white chequerboard patterns that occur on its wings. The larvae feed on a range of foodplants including wild strawberry (*Fragaria vesca)* and creeping cinquefoil *(Potentilla reptans).* Three main types of habitat are used: woodland rides, glades and clearings; unimproved grassland, especially chalk downland but also other calcareous soils including clays; and recently abandoned industrial sites such as disused spoil heaps, mine workings, railway lines and even rubbish tips.

The grizzled skipper needs warm well-structured habitats that are inherently highly dynamic. Sites with south-facing banks are particularly good. Abundant nectar sources are required with a variety of species used including dandelion *(Taraxacum* sp.), knapweed (*Centaurea nigra)* and buttercup *(Ranunculus* sp.). Seed heads of around 30-40 cm are used for roosting and knapweed, St John's wort *(Hypericum* sp.) and ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolate)* are used, as are young hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna)* saplings. The butterfly suffered not only from the wholesale loss of semi-natural grassland in lowland Britain during the 20th century, but also from abandonment and changing management of the habitats that remain. It suffered badly from the cessation of traditional woodland coppicing and lack of regular canopy gaps in modern woodland. On industrial and disused railway land it has suffered from the decline of heavy industry and the gradual scrubbing up of these neglected sites.

The grizzled skipper is generally single brooded with adults flying from the end of April to mid-June. The eggs are laid singly on foodplants growing in warm positions, next to either bare ground or short vegetation. The larvae build a series of "tents", formed by spinning together the edge of leaves, which protect them as they grow. They leave these shelters only to make brief feeding visits to nearby leaves or move to spin new shelters. As they grow they become more mobile and select lush

(nutrient rich) plants growing in taller vegetation or more coarse-leaved plants such as bramble *(Rubus fruticosus)*. They over winter as pupae amongst low vegetation.

2.2 Population and distribution

The grizzled skipper has continued to decline in the region as a whole over the last two decades. In Worcestershire the butterfly is now found on just a few sites, mainly associated with railway cuttings, siding and embankments, spoil heaps and quarries.

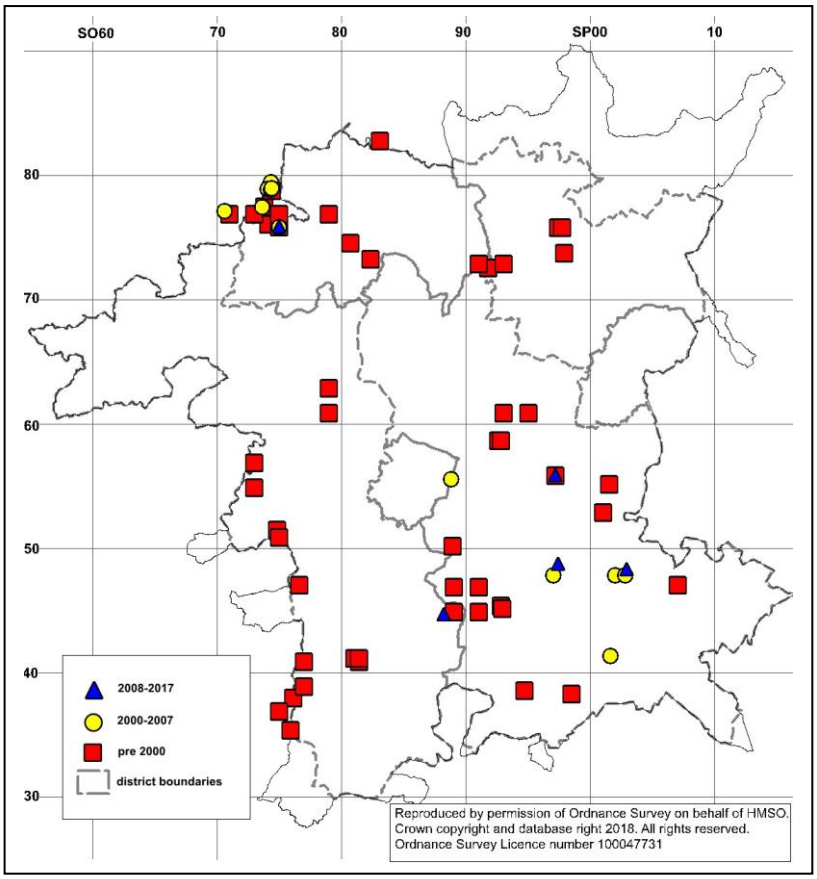

Figure 1. Records of grizzled skipper in Worcestershire. Data supplied and map prepared by Worcestershire Biological Records Centre.

2.3 Legislation

The butterfly is listed in schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006.

2.4 Summary of important sites

- The Wyre Forest, now a rare example in the region of the species using its traditional woodland habitat where the butterfly is found mainly on the short sward of the water pipeline and the rocket testing station

- The disused railway-lines at Honeybourne where the butterfly utilizes a mosaic of habitat types with areas of bare ground or short turf, some areas of taller herb rich grass and scrub

- Throckmorton landfill site where the butterfly has been recorded on the restored areas of grassland

- Hipton Hill, a large area of old plum orchard grazed in rotation and managed by Vale Landscape Heritage Trust

3. Current Factors Affecting the Species

- Lack of appropriate management (e.g scrub control, grazing, increasing sward height) leading to a deterioration in habitat quality.

- Overgrazing (but some sites can be maintained in an appropriate condition by rabbit grazing).

- Tightening of the sward and loss of bare ground.

- Re-opening of disused railway-lines.

- Development of brownfield sites.

- Fragmentation and isolation of existing colonies and the intensive use of the surrounding agricultural land. As many of the butterfly's habitats are transient, the species requires either a cycle of continuous management to maintain early successional stages within a site, or the creation of new areas that are colonized as existing ones become unsuitable.

4. Current Action

4.1 Local protection

Much of the Wyre Forest is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and part of it a National Nature Reserve (NNR).

Hipton Hill was listed as a Local Wildlife Site (LWS) in 2018. This is not a statutory designation but gives some protection within the planning system.

4.2 Site management and programmes of action

- Butterfly Conservation is working in partnership with Severn Waste Services to manage habitat for grizzled skipper at Throckmorton Landfill Site and work parties are delivered by local volunteers.

- The Hipton Hill site is owned and managed by Vale Landscape Heritage Trust. The old plum orchard includes 28 hectares of fruit trees, grassland and scrub habitat.

- The disused railway line at Honeybourne is owned by Railway Paths Ltd, a sister charity of Sustrans, and is promoted as a walking and cycling route. Butterfly Conservation volunteers liaise with Railway Paths and deliver periodic habitat management work parties.

- Butterfly Conservation has worked with local partners on a series of funded projects within the Wyre Forest from 2003 to the present day, including the 3-year SITA Trust-funded project 'Back to Orange' from 2007-2010. One of the main aims of all of this work is to improve and increase habitat for lepidoptera species within the forest.

4.3 Survey, research and monitoring

- As part of the legacy of the 'Back to Orange' project the Wyre Forest Butterfly Group was set up in 2010 to encourage more local people to become involved in survey and monitoring work across the forest. Membership of this group has gradually increased to 40 active volunteers in 2017.

- Timed count transects are undertaken annually at the Honeybourne site by Butterfly Conservation volunteers.

5. Associated plans

Grassland, Woodland, Urban.

6. Conservation Aim

TBC

7. Conservation Objectives

TBC

References and further information

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