

Brown Hairstreak

Thecla betulae

Species Action Plan

1. Introduction

The brown hairstreak butterfly was once fairly widespread in England and Wales but the number of 10km squares in which it is recorded declined by 49% in the UK between 1976 and 2014, largely due to the loss of woodlands and hedgerows and the widespread practice of annually flailing hedgerows on all sides. The species 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 brown hairstreak is an elusive butterfly that lays its eggs on suckering blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), and sometimes other *Prunus* species, along hedgerows and woodland margins, rides and clearings. The eggs are laid at the base of the spines or at junctions between branches during August to October and remain as eggs throughout the winter months making them very susceptible to winter flailing. Sunny, sheltered positions are favoured for egg-laying. The caterpillars emerge in the following April / May and continue to feed on blackthorn until they pupate in early July. The chrysalis is formed close to the ground amongst leaves and is sometimes tended by ants. Colonies are normally centred on a wood, but egg-laying usually extends over several square miles of the surrounding countryside. A complex of woodlands, scrubby areas and hedgerows with abundant, suitably managed blackthorn is therefore required. Most colonies occur on heavy clay soils where blackthorn is dominant in the constituent hedg

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grown to **54** 1km squares by 2005 and to **111**

planting of blackthorn and ride clearance. In 2016/17 the brown hairstreak population was continuing to increase with a count of 555 eggs within the wood.

Trench Wood SSSI is also managed jointly by Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and Butterfly Conservation. Work is continuing to map the occurrence of egg laying within the wood and further blackthorn planting has taken place along with management of existing blackthorn stands. A number of other Wildlife Trust reserves have also been found to hold populations of the butterfly and the Trust plays an important role in the conservation of this species in the wider landscape.

4.2 Site management and programmes of action

Butterfly Conservation works with Natural England to ensure that landowners farming within the area central to the butterfly's Worcestershire population are aware of the species' habitat requirements. A number of local landowners have entered into agri-environment schemes with hedgerow management for brown hairstreak as a key component of their agreements.

Grafton Wood and Trench Wood have regular

