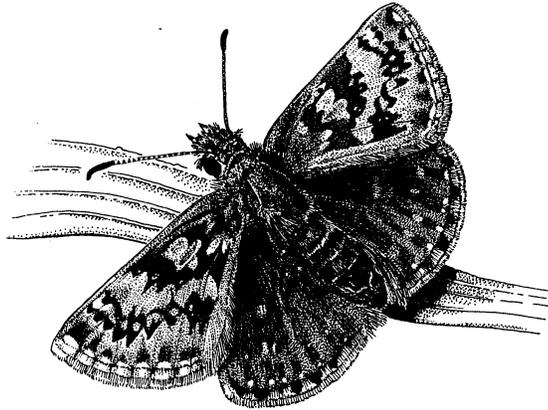


## Dingy Skipper (*Erynnis tages*)

*The Dingy Skipper is a coastal or downland butterfly. It is a sedentary species that requires sheltered sunny sites kept short by grazing or disturbance where its caterpillars feed on Bird's Foot Trefoil or Horseshoe Vetch. Once considered common, the dingy skipper has undergone a dramatic decline in Suffolk due to habitat loss and fragmentation. It now survives in a handful of small colonies in the Breckland, mostly in clearings or rides in conifer plantations. The Dingy Skipper is probably Suffolk's most threatened butterfly.*



### 1 Definition

The Dingy Skipper is a small grey-brown butterfly. It is unlikely to be confused with any other British butterfly but its dull colouring may make it more easily confused with certain day flying moths, some of which occupy the same habitat at the same time of year. It is primarily a grassland butterfly and it is found in habitats such as woodland rides, heathland and railway cuttings which are sunny but sheltered. It is also known to occupy disused industrial sites such as quarries and railway embankments. The larval food plant Birds Foot Trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) is the determining factor and this occurs most frequently on light sandy soils where rabbit grazing is prevalent.

### 2 Current Status

#### 2.1 National

The Dingy Skipper was once regarded as a common butterfly in the south of England but since WWII it has been retreating from former strongholds. It is now rare through most of its range, apart from the South Downs and coast. It is absent from 40% of 10km squares in the UK that were occupied during a survey of 1970/1982.

## **2.2 Local**

The Dingy Skipper is known from five sites within five tetrads in Suffolk. All of the colonies are on residual heathland in the Breckland, mostly where shelter is provided by coniferous forest. The strongest colony is on the RAF Barnham Training Area (SSSI); just to the west there have been recent records Center Parcs leisure development but none lately from Marmansgrave Wood. Further south, the former stronghold of the King's Forest still supports small populations in several rides.

## **2.3 Natural Areas**

Breckland

## **3 Current factors causing loss or decline**

Breckland clearings are a sub-optimal habitat, further threatened by the following:

- Fragmentation and isolation of sites caused by agricultural intensification.
- Lack of management of suitable sites. The populations at RAF Barnham are threatened by shading from the adjacent plantation and have declined over the last few years.
- Loss of open grassy rides in conifer plantations.
- Myxomatosis affecting rabbit grazing regime.
- Unsympathetic forestry operations.

## **4 Current Action**

### **4.1 Legal status**

The Dingy Skipper is a Species of Conservation Concern in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, and a Top Priority species in Butterfly Conservation's Regional Action Plan. It is not protected in the UK.

### **4.2 Management, research and guidance**

- Forest Enterprise is aware of the location of the remaining breeding areas in King's Forest. Rides supporting Dingy Skipper have been designated as conservation rides. A management prescription is in place and "dragons teeth" have been erected to exclude heavy plant from one key area.
- Center Parcs domain is managed sympathetically for wildlife, and the Dingy Skipper flies in a relatively small area of recently seeded wildflower rich grassland with a man-made embankment. A regular recording transect is conducted at Center Parcs.
- Butterfly Conservation has produced a National Species Action Plan (2000), and its recommendations have been incorporated into this plan, where relevant. Further information on ecological requirements may be forthcoming, as further research is being put in train as a (National) action in that plan.

- Good contacts have been established between Suffolk Branch of Butterfly Conservation and the landowners (Ministry of Defence, Center Parcs, & Forest Enterprise). As a result, the Dingy Skipper features in the management plans for RAF Barnham, Center Parcs and in the Forest Enterprise Conservation database used for forest management.
- Populations are monitored by site visits conducted on suitable days during the flight period (May /early June).

## **5 Action Plan Objectives and Targets**

- 1. Enhance the existing population at current sites through appropriate management.*
- 2. Identify areas where suitable habitat can be extended, with a view to natural re-colonisation.*
- 3. Further survey work on potential sites including a review of past records.*

**6 Dingy Skipper: Proposed action with lead agencies**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Partners</b>
<b>POLICY</b>		
None proposed.		
<b>SITE SAFEGUARD AND MANAGEMENT</b>		
Ensure the requirements of the Dingy Skipper are incorporated into management plans.	2006	RAF, FE, CP
Ensure continued appropriate management of sites.	2004 2005 2006 2007	RAF,FE,CP
Draw up list of sites where Dingy Skipper has been recorded since 1998 and consider whether management may restore suitable habitat.	2004	<b>BC</b>
Liaise with RAF to establish trial grazing to areas of RAF Barham training area.	2005	<b>EN, RAF</b>
Do not cull rabbits or introduce myxomatosis without considering the impact on Dingy Skipper.	2004 2005 2006 2007	RAF, FE, CP
Ensure development proposals do not affect present sites by checking any new planning applications.	2004 2005 2006 2007	<b>SWT, EN, FHDC</b>
<b>SPECIES MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION</b>		
Manage sites to encourage natural re-colonisation by extending habitat.	2004 2005 2006 2007	<b>FE, CP</b>
Investigate the suitability for Dingy Skipper of any sites resulting from habitat creation schemes.	2004 2005 2006 2007	FE, SWT

In the event that natural re-colonisation fails, investigate the desirability of a possible re-introduction at selected sites (strictly following Butterfly Conservation code).	2007	<b>BC, FE</b>
<b>RESEARCH AND MONITORING</b>		
Continue monitoring at known sites annually.	2004 2005 2006 2007	<b>BC, CP</b>
Survey areas adjacent to known and former sites and any other potential sites.	2004 2005 2006 2007	<b>BC</b>
Liaise with other regional Butterfly Conservation branches (particularly Norfolk – Barham cross Common) to ensure dissemination of up to date information on the species.	2004 2006	<b>BC</b>
<b>ADVISORY</b>		
Maintain inputs to landowners conservation committees, and provide reports and feedback.	2004 2005 2006 2007	<b>BC</b>
Ensure site managers are aware of the habitat requirements of the Dingy Skipper.	2004	<b>BC</b>
<b>COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY</b>		
Organise and promote one training day per year to enable new people to help with the survey work.	2004 2005 2006 2007	<b>BC</b>
Improve awareness of status of the species through articles in appropriate publications.	2004 2005 2006 2007	<b>BC, SWT, FWAG, SNS</b>