

Funding for butterfly farm project

Butterfly experts have been awarded £727,000 for a project to help farmers in the Scottish Borders improve their land for wildlife and boost business at the same time.

National charity Butterfly Conservation will trial a host of experimental techniques at farms in the south of Scotland over the next six years.

The funding is part of the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal – an agreement between Scottish and UK governments to invest £452 million to boost the economy around the Border.

Part of the funding will be used to employ a dedicated project officer to work with farmers to maintain and enhance habitat for the endangered Northern Brown Argus butterfly and other wildlife.

Dr Tom Prescott, the butterfly charity's Head of Conservation for Scotland, said: "This is a hugely exciting project for us.

"One of the reasons that people love this part of Scotland is that so much of the land is still managed in traditional ways that benefit wildlife.

"If we can prove that landowners can maintain and restore important habitats then it preserves that Borders magic for visitors and the people and wildlife that live here."

The Northern Brown Argus, a delicate orange-and-brown insect,

used to be widespread but its UK distribution plummeted 56% between 1990 and 2018.

Its caterpillars only eat one plant, Common Rock Rose, which is usually only found in species-rich grassland of which 90% has been lost in the UK in the past century. Now, 80% of the UK population is found in Scotland and half of that is in the Borders, and Dumfries and Galloway.

Butterfly Conservation volunteers have been surveying Northern Brown Argus in the Borders since 2016. More than half the sites assessed are now under threat, mainly disappearing under tree planting schemes or being overrun by bracken, gorse and other scrub that shades out wildflowers and grasses.

The kind of species-rich grassland needed is best maintained by light livestock grazing, which has led to a long and close association between the butterfly and farmers.

The Northern Brown Argus is also an “indicator species”, with numbers breeding at any location offering a useful guide to the wider health of the natural environment for other wildlife including invaluable pollinators such as bees.

The Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal, signed in March 2021, is overseen by a partnership including Scottish Borders Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council, Cumberland Council, Northumberland County Council and Westmorland and Furness Council.

Butterfly Conservation’s project is the first to be awarded funding in the Borders as part of the wider Borderlands Natural Capital Scotland Programme, made up of six pilot projects aimed at supporting innovative ways of working with the environment, economic development, and land management.

Cllr Euan Jardine, Leader of Scottish Borders Council and Borderlands Partnership co-chairman, said: “This project is the first to start delivery in our Natural Capital Scotland

programme.

“It is an innovative project looking at how to develop the benefits of the natural capital of our region, working closely with farmers to improve their land while also increasing the biodiversity and improving the natural capital of the Borderlands region.”



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