

Dark green fritillary *Argynnis aglaja*

STATUS

**National priority low,
regional priority medium.**



WHAT IS THE DARK GREEN FRITILLARY ?

This butterfly occurs in a range of habitats from moorland, heath to unimproved grassland, where its larvae feed on common dog-violet (*Viola riviniana*). It does not like damp habitats. The adult butterflies prefer to feed on the nectar of thistles. It is similar in appearance to the small pearl-bordered fritillary, the top of its wings being a golden/orange colour with black markings, although it is larger than that species. It gets its name from the dark green colour on its underwings. The dark green fritillary is a swift flying butterfly, unlike the sedentary small pearl-bordered fritillary.

WHERE IS IT FOUND IN THE UK?

The dark green fritillary is widely distributed, it is most common in south west England, Wales and Scotland.

WHY IS THE DARK GREEN FRITILLARY OF CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE?

This butterfly is believed to be declining to the point of extinction in County Durham, although it may be that populations exist in under-recorded areas, especially in the west of the county. Reasons for this apparent decline are poorly understood. It has been speculated that an increase in sheep grazing of moorland above Hamsterley Forest and Bollihope Common may have affected the abundance of its larval foodplant.

THE DARK GREEN FRITILLARY IN THE DURHAM AREA

HOW HEALTHY ARE THE POPULATIONS OF THE DARK GREEN FRITILLARY?

As recently as 1986 the dark green fritillary was described as widespread in the west of County Durham with Pikestone Fell, Bollihope Common and Hamsterley Forest being traditionally regarded as strongholds. However, very few recent records have been received of sightings from the two former areas (suggesting low levels of surveillance). A 1996 survey recorded no individuals and only three individuals in 1997. Consequently, Butterfly Conservation's regional priority for this species has been upgraded to 'medium'.

HOW MUCH DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE DARK GREEN FRITILLARY IN THE DURHAM AREA ?

No specific survey has been carried out in the north east for this butterfly, although informal searches by local experts are carried out regularly. Very low numbers have been found in Hamsterley Forest and the surrounding area.

WHERE HAS IT BEEN FOUND IN THE DURHAM AREA ?

The dark green fritillary has been found at Pikestone Fell, Bollihope Common, Thrislington and at Hamsterley Forest. There have been several sightings at other locations across the county but these are most likely strays as the sites do not support suitable habitat.

THE DARK GREEN FRITILLARY IS AT RISK FROM:

Loss of habitat containing common dog-violet, the butterfly's food plant.

Overgrazing by sheep which would also be detrimental to the foodplant.

Improvement of grassland with artificial fertilisers, which would affect the foodplant.

Collecting: collection of the species still occurs occasionally, this can have detrimental effects, especially on small populations.

THE DARK GREEN FRITILLARY BENEFITS FROM:

Management of land that promotes *Viola spp.*

Reduction in the intensity of sheep grazing regimes.

IMPORTANT HABITATS FOR THE DARK GREEN FRITILLARY:

Lowland heathland	**
Fen (valley mire)	
Upland heath and blanket bog	*

OTHER SPECIES ACTION PLANS COVERING ISSUES RELEVANT TO THE DARK GREEN FRITILLARY:

Small pearl-bordered fritillary	**
Green hairstreak	*

N.B. ** indicates action plan produced in 1998.

* indicates action plan produced in 2000.

THE DARK GREEN FRITILLARY AND THE LAW

The dark green fritillary is not protected.

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TARGETS FOR THE CONSERVATION OF THE DARK GREEN FRITILLARY IN THE DURHAM AREA:

DATE

Target 1 *Maintain all currently known populations above current level.* **ONGOING**

Target 2 *Carry out baseline survey to discover the status of the dark green fritillary in County Durham.* **2004**

Target 3 *Create suitable habitats for the dark green fritillary in its former range, to encourage recolonisation.* **ONGOING**

DARK GREEN FRITILLARY ACTIONS

ACTION	DATE	POSSIBLE PARTNERS	MEETS TARGET NO.
<u>SPECIES MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION</u>			
1. Protect colonies threatened by habitat loss or change.	ONGOING	EN, DWT, FC, NT, Site owners.	1
<u>SITE MANAGEMENT</u>			
2. Continue to implement or encourage implementation of WES and RES management regimes on SSSIs supporting the dark green fritillary and seek opportunities to extend habitat patches within existing sites.	2008	EN, DWT, FC, Site owners.	1, 3
3. Encourage implementation of appropriate management schemes (e.g. Countryside stewardship) on County Wildlife Sites and other sites supporting the dark green fritillary.	2008	DBAP, DWT, EN, FC, FWAG, MAFF, Site owners.	1, 3
<u>RESEARCH AND MONITORING</u>			
4. Survey work to establish current status in the region.	2004	BC	1, 2
5. Encourage or undertake ecological research, which assists the conservation of the dark green fritillary: population structure, habitat requirements and habitat management.	2008	EN, BC	1, 3
<u>ADVISORY</u>			
6. Ensure land owners and managers are aware of the presence of the dark green fritillary and the importance of it's conservation with appropriate methods of habitat management.	ONGOING	DBAP, EN, BC, LAs, DWT, FWAG	1, 3
<u>COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY</u>			
7. In environmental interpretation and education, raise the profile of the dark green fritillary as one of the top priority butterflies in the North East.	2008	BC, DBAP, EN, LA21	1, 3