# Small Blue butterfly numbers soar in Scotland thanks to targeted conservation efforts



Recent observations in Scotland have highlighted a remarkable resurgence of the Small Blue butterfly, a species known for its small size and vibrant colouration. Data collected shows counts soaring above 500 at specific sites, compared to just a fraction of that number in previous years. Notably, volunteers reported 523 individuals at the Balnagown Estate, a significant increase from last year, underscoring effective conservation efforts and land management practices aimed at sustaining this fragile species.

As Scotland gears up for Small Blue Week, running from May 31 to June 7, the butterfly conservation community is buoyed by newfound optimism. Tracy Munro, the Species on the Edge Project Officer with Butterfly Conservation, expressed her excitement, noting the profound joy in receiving enthusiastic messages from volunteers across the northern and eastern coasts as they discover these butterflies in abundant numbers. She remarked, "To record over 500 at a single site is staggering and really highlights the benefits of our working with landowners and volunteers to create habitat for this charismatic wee butterfly."

The Small Blue (Cupido minimus) is distinguished not only by its diminutive size—averaging just two to three centimetres across—but also by its specific dietary needs, relying exclusively on Kidney Vetch for sustenance. Unfortunately, the species has been categorised as Near Threatened, suffering a 39% decline in abundance since 2005 in Scotland alone. These alarming trends are primarily attributed to habitat destruction and broader land use changes.

While the resurgence of the Small Blue is encouraging, conservationists caution against complacency. The decline of butterfly populations in the UK has been stark, with last year being recorded as the fifth worst on record for overall butterfly numbers. Experts like Tom Prescott, Butterfly Conservation's Head of Conservation for Scotland, emphasise the vital role of high-quality habitats in facilitating population recovery and expansion. The current surge suggests the possibility of a second brood this year—an unusual phenomenon for this species in Scotland—which could see new caterpillars emerging in August thanks to their wider search for adequate habitat.

In addition to local conservation efforts, the Ministry of Defence has also joined the fray, implementing habitat restoration projects at military training areas such as Barry Buddon in Angus. Collaborations between military and conservation organisations have led to initiatives that involve planting Kidney Vetch along road verges, demonstrating an innovative approach to combine military training needs with environmental stewardship.

The successful collaboration amongst various stakeholders, including community groups and schools, is commendable. Initiatives like those at Woodlands Primary School, where pupils engage in sowing wildflower seeds and planting Kidney Vetch, are crucial for fostering a sense of environmental responsibility and providing essential feeding grounds for the Small Blue.

Looking ahead, the Species on the Edge programme, backed by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, aims to bolster efforts to reverse the trend of declining populations among various coastal species in Scotland, including the Small Blue. This comprehensive initiative seeks to secure not just isolated conservation successes but a broader spectrum of biodiversity across the region.

As the Small Blue butterfly begins to thrive once more, it stands as a testament to what concerted conservation efforts can achieve. Yet, awareness and ongoing investment in habitat restoration remain imperative if these enchanting creatures are to flourish sustainably in the years to come.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25202001.scotland-sees-explosion-small-blue-butterflies/?ref=rss), [[5]](https://butterfly-conservation.org/in-your-area/scottish-office/priority-species-updates/small-blue)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25202001.scotland-sees-explosion-small-blue-butterflies/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/rare-butterfly-finds-home-at-military-training-area-in-scotland), [[3]](https://www.nature.scot/doc/updates-our-area-teams-october-2023)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://insidedio.blog.gov.uk/2023/08/03/supporting-biodiversity-on-the-mod-estate-in-scotland/), [[6]](https://www.nature.scot/new-conservation-programme-tackling-decline-vulnerable-coastal-species-scotland-launched-today), [[7]](https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/news/small-blue-butterfly-thriving-in-irvine/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25202001.scotland-sees-explosion-small-blue-butterflies/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/rare-butterfly-finds-home-at-military-training-area-in-scotland> - A conservation project at Barry Buddon Training Area in Angus, Scotland, has successfully restored habitats for the rare Small Blue butterfly. The initiative, a collaboration between the Ministry of Defence, Defence Infrastructure Organisation, and conservation partners, involved planting Kidney Vetch along road and track verges to create a feeding corridor for the butterfly. The presence of the Small Blue at this site demonstrates the effectiveness of habitat restoration efforts in supporting biodiversity within military training areas.
3. <https://www.nature.scot/doc/updates-our-area-teams-october-2023> - NatureScot's October 2023 update highlights ongoing conservation efforts for the Small Blue butterfly along Scotland's east and north coasts. In Aberdeenshire, volunteers have been surveying and recording sightings of the Small Blue, with confirmed observations in Carnoustie. Additionally, Woodlands Primary School has been involved in habitat enhancement activities, including sowing wildflower and Kidney Vetch seeds to support the butterfly's population. These community-driven initiatives are crucial for the species' conservation.
4. <https://insidedio.blog.gov.uk/2023/08/03/supporting-biodiversity-on-the-mod-estate-in-scotland/> - The Ministry of Defence's Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) has been actively involved in supporting biodiversity on its Scottish estate. A notable project includes habitat restoration for the Small Blue butterfly at Barry Buddon Training Area in Angus. This initiative, in partnership with Landmarc and Butterfly Conservation, focuses on planting Kidney Vetch along road and track verges to create feeding corridors for the butterfly, demonstrating the DIO's commitment to balancing military training with environmental conservation.
5. <https://butterfly-conservation.org/in-your-area/scottish-office/priority-species-updates/small-blue> - Butterfly Conservation Scotland provides updates on the Small Blue butterfly, the UK's smallest resident butterfly. The species has experienced a significant decline in Scotland over the past two decades, with fewer than 80 colonies remaining. The 'Species on the Edge' programme aims to reverse this trend by implementing conservation actions along Scotland's coast, including habitat restoration and monitoring efforts. The programme seeks to secure and improve the future for coastal and island species in Scotland.
6. <https://www.nature.scot/new-conservation-programme-tackling-decline-vulnerable-coastal-species-scotland-launched-today> - NatureScot, in partnership with seven conservation charities, has launched the 'Species on the Edge' programme to address the decline of vulnerable coastal species in Scotland. The initiative focuses on 37 priority species, including the Small Blue butterfly, and aims to secure and improve their future through habitat restoration, species monitoring, and community engagement. The programme is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and represents a significant effort to conserve Scotland's coastal biodiversity.
7. <https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/news/small-blue-butterfly-thriving-in-irvine/> - The Scottish Wildlife Trust reports that the Small Blue butterfly is thriving in Irvine, Ayrshire, following a successful translocation project. After being absent from the area since 1983, around 30 butterflies were relocated from the Moray coast to the Gailes Marsh Wildlife Reserve and Dundonald Links golf course, where Kidney Vetch, the butterfly's sole food plant, grows abundantly. The project demonstrates the potential for species recovery through habitat restoration and careful management.