

Banking on BUTTERFLIES

Butterflies in Beds are getting new AirB&B des res thanks to a ground breaking research project

The butterflies of Bedfordshire are in for treat, getting some newly provided habitat this month, courtesy of a new project with the Wildlife Trust in Bedfordshire. Specially designed 15 metre long by two metre high banks are being constructed to create conditions suitable for those species struggling to adapt to climate change.



SMALL BLUE



CHALKHILL BLUE

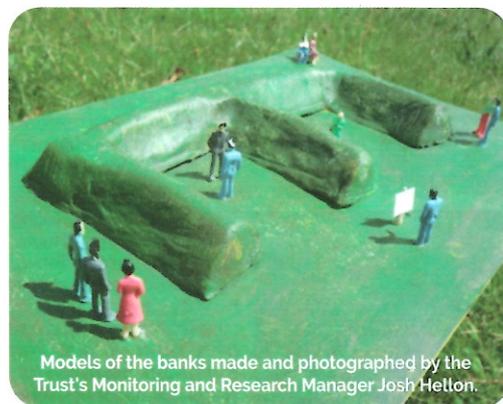


DUKE OF BURGUNDY

Work is taking place at two Wildlife Trust chalk grassland reserves at Totternhoe and Pegsdon which will provide convenient niches to help butterflies including the small blue, the chalkhill blue, and the nationally rare Duke of Burgundy. This project Banking on Butterflies is a collaboration with the Zoology department, University of Cambridge, looking at mitigating impacts of climate change for temperature sensitive butterflies, and the study will look in detail at how man-made sheltered and unsheltered banks can provide a range of micro habitats and microclimates to benefit a wide variety of species in a changing climate.

This is pioneering research as it's the first experiment looking at the effectiveness of bank design in relation to mitigating the effects of climate change. Researchers will record and analyse data to determine the success of the scheme, which could then be mirrored at other sites. Protecting and boosting the abundance of insects is central to restoring functioning ecosystems, which are so critical to tackling the climate crisis.

The project builds on previous collaborative studies stretching back over 15 years, investigating microhabitats for butterflies on Wildlife Trust nature reserves. From this research, the team have a detailed understanding of which types of habitat features are important to butterflies. The next step was to design and test features providing microhabitats with different climatic conditions: as the climate changes,



Models of the banks made and photographed by the Trust's Monitoring and Research Manager Josh Hellon.

other factors may become more important - for example cooler, north-facing areas may potentially provide greater protection from higher temperatures. The creation of habitat features will also help the movement of wildlife through the landscape - improved connectivity can prevent other species becoming trapped in dwindling pockets of suitable habitat.

The banks have been carefully designed to provide a variety of conditions and degrees of shelter that will be studied over several years, and results from careful monitoring will enable these expert conservationists to improve habitat management and to better advise others on creating similar features.

In the first week of September four banks will be constructed at Totternhoe nature reserve, and the following week four identical banks will be built at Pegsdon. As we know, climate change is already having a profound effect on our wildlife - some species are moving northwards in response to a warming climate. Many species, however, are not mobile enough to be able to do this in time or have specialist habitat requirements; this makes them especially vulnerable to climate change. In the fullness of time the project will aim to produce a clear, practical guide for others on the creation and monitoring of similar habitat features.

Funding for the work is via the People's Postcode Lottery Nature Based Solutions Fund, for which the Trust are very grateful.



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For more information visit:
www.wildlifebcn.org/news/banking-butterflies