

Protect our butterflies. 12 August 2011

### **Protect our butterflies**

The fluttering, dancing effervescence of our butterflies is, without doubt, one of the heart-lifting facets of the British summer (In praise of butterflies, 22 July). While it is important that we engage our children and grandchildren in activities such as the national big butterfly count ([www.bigbutterflycount.org](http://www.bigbutterflycount.org)), there is also much that the present generation should be doing.

Supported by the findings of the recent National Ecosystem Assessment, Defra should continue to encourage better hedgerow and headland management for wildlife. This is a step in the right direction, but much more can be done. The European common agricultural policy is due for reform in 2013 and we should be fiercely lobbying for any farm payments to be tied to environmental conservation. The services that society receives from a well-functioning ecosystem will more than adequately compensate us for the cost and will ensure sustainable environmentally friendly stewardship of our natural resources in the future.

In the meantime, there much that can be done at the local level. I react with despair to the irresponsible application of glyphosate herbicide on the potentially flower-rich verges of our towns. And the annual destruction of nettles - food for many of our Nymphalidae (small tortoiseshell, peacock, comma and red admiral) - from the sides of our footpaths and bridleways goes a long way towards explaining the decline of these delightful pollinators.

But perhaps the biggest crime is the wilful destruction of our greenbelts. These appear to be everywhere under threat to build more housing for the unsustainable population increase in the country (and, indeed, worldwide). If we are to take the challenge of effectively combating the impacts of climate change, then a very good place to start would be to ensure

the production and protection of a healthy butterfly population.

**Brian Sims**  
Bedford, UK