



# THYME (and management) TO SAVE THE LARGE BLUE



The [Large Blue](#) is an endangered species in Europe and protected by law. Consequently, it is the rarest butterfly in the UK.

The Large Blue life cycle relies on the presence of both Wild Thyme and the nests of *Myrmica* red ants (were they feed on any grubs in the nest).

Safeguarding its future in the UK is currently focused in two landscapes; the Poldens Hills and the Cotswolds.

The Polden Hills now supports nearly 80% of the British Large Blue populations and therefore consolidating this network of sites, and indeed expanding it beyond the main Polden Ridge is crucial to the future of this butterfly in Britain.



The first introduction of the Large Blue in the Poldens was made in 1992. Subsequent introductions were made to three other sites in the surrounding area between 1995-2004. Encouragingly, many further small breeding areas have been naturally re-colonised by the butterfly where habitat has been improved.

At a landscape scale, restoration of suitable habitat on historically occupied but currently unoccupied sites to the west of the main Poldens Ridge, is important to establish a network of Large Blue sites.

**Expanding the Large Blue in the Polden Hills** is a three year project that started in July 2011. Butterfly Conservation received funding from SITA and BBC Wildlife to conduct this project that aims to:

- To restore suitable habitat on currently unoccupied sites to the west of the main Poldens Ridge, focussing on Aller Hill SSSI, where the butterfly was known to support large populations in the early 1800s.
- To restore further habitat on occupied sites where the populations are not believed to be self-sustaining.
- To restore further habitat on sites with the greatest potential to act as source populations for colonisation of unoccupied sites.



The restoration of the sites will involve a number of conservation tasks involving the Polden's Large Blue Action group including the local community, partner organisations volunteer groups, as well as using contractors, to manage the scrub that has encroached many areas of downland.

As the Large Blue life cycle relies on the presence of both Wild Thyme *Thymus serpyllum* and ants *Myrmica sabuleti* the sites involved in the project have been assessed for the presence of the ant and areas identified where Wild Thyme would be ideal for planting.

Five local nurseries, are helping to meet the project aims and the Large Blue by propagating Thyme that has been sourced locally from occupied sites. The bigger plants will then be planted on currently unoccupied sites to assist with their restoration and the colonisation of the Large Blue.



Millfield School and  
J&F Clark Trust



For further information you can visit the following:

- [Butterfly Conservation website](#)
- [SITA Trust-Expanding the Large Blue in the Polden Hills](#)
- [BBC Wildlife Fund](#)

