

I-B1 Argent and Sable *Rheumaptera hastata* SPECIES ACTION PLAN

1. Current status

1.1 Argent and sable is a black and white day-flying moth, especially in warm sunshine, and being a fast flyer can be difficult to follow. "Argent" and "sable" are heraldic terms for white and black respectively.

1.2 The argent and sable breeds in woodland with birch re-growth (<2 metres tall) in sunshine and in open moorland and bogs, particularly those at higher altitudes or in coastal areas. Many of the populations that survive are in the rides and edges of conifer plantations established from the 1950s onwards, where a weed growth of birch is still available though often diminishing. The larva of this species feeds on birch *Betula pendula* (and probably *B. pubescens*) and bog myrtle *Myrica gale*. Since bog myrtle is not known in Monmouthshire, the local foodplant will be birch.

On birch it spins two or three leaves together and feeds from within the chamber, eating just the inner surface when small and later eating right through the leaf. The moth flies by day in warm sunny weather between May to early July. Eggs are found on birch re-growth less than 30 cm tall in full sun, and in woodland the larvae are mostly found on low birch coppice. It has been suggested that this could be because young birch growth contains fewer toxins than mature birch. The argent and sable over winters as pupae, which have been found in moss at the base of trees in woodland.

1.3 The argent and sable occurs throughout most of England, except East Anglia, eastern Wales, and the southern uplands, the Hebrides, and the far northwest of Scotland. It has declined throughout much of England and is now only thinly scattered. The UK population was estimated at 21 sites by the Action for Moths Project (Data source: BARS).

1.4 The Butterfly Conservation Action for Moths project estimated that there are just 3 sites in Wales in the counties of Monmouthshire and Denbighshire. However, there are other post-1980 records of isolated sightings in Brecknock, Glamorgan and Pembrokeshire.

1.5 There is a cluster of records on both Glos and Monmouthshire sides of the Wye Valley. Historical records date back to the 19th century (1892, 1906, 1907 and 1937).

The three post-1980 Monmouthshire records are:
1988 Trellech (Fedw Fawr) SO4906.

- 1991 Croes Robert (GWT Reserve) SO481060. This was soon after the wood had been clear felled. Despite searches, no subsequent specimens have been sighted.
- 2004 Hendre Wood SO482121. A possible sighting in 2003 was confirmed by a definite record in 2004. However, a further search in 2005 failed to find the species. This section of Hendre Wood had been felled in 2002/3.
- 1.6 Though difficult to prove, it seems likely that the species is moving around the Wye Valley as recently-felled sites with regenerating scrub birch become available, using a site for a few years and then abandoning it as it grows up.
- 1.5 Argent and Sable is a UK BAP Priority Species and listed on the NERC Act Section 42 list. In Great Britain this species is classified as *Nationally Scarce*.

2. Current factors affecting the species (In rank order of importance)

- 2.1 Lack of birch regeneration at wood edges and on rides in high forest systems due to the decline of coppicing and other active woodland management. A 5-10 year coppice cycle of birch provides best habitat. Alternatively, sporadic cutting of woodland rides can help this species.
- 2.2 Isolation of suitable areas due to fragmentation of the landscape by development.

3. Current action

- 3.1 The Forestry Commission's *Coppice for Butterflies Challenge* (Woodland Improvement Grant) scheme has targeted three areas where the argent and sable is present including the Wye Valley.
- 3.2 Butterfly Conservation released a fact sheet on argent and sable in 2005, sponsored by DEFRA. It is obtainable from the BC website www.butterfly-conservation.org/conbio/defrafactsheets/.
- 3.3 A Butterfly Conservation training day was held at Monmouth in June 2005 (including a visit to Hendre Wood) to raise awareness of argent and sable, to aid species recognition and encourage surveying.

4. Proposed target

- 4.1 Maintain the range of this species within the Wye Valley and surrounding areas. Including the Gloucestershire records, this covers 10km squares SO40, SO41, ST59, SO50 and SO51.

5. Proposed actions and key partners for Argent and Sable

Action	Key Partners		Timescale
	Lead	Support	
1.1 Policy and Legislation			
1.1 Ensure policies and strategies do not adversely affect the breeding population of argent and sable.	MCC	CCW	Ongoing
1.2 Ensure argent and sable is fully considered when assessing any development, which may impact upon the species.	MCC	BC, CCW, GWT	Ongoing
1.3 When there is no alternative ensure that appropriate mitigation or compensation measures for argent and sable are used during development.	MCC	MCS, MDC	Ongoing
1.4 Ensure opportunities for enhancing habitat for argent and sable are used during the planning process	MCC	MCS, MDC	Ongoing
2. Funding and Incentives			
2.1 Where appropriate, include the requirements of the species when preparing or revising prescriptions for Woodland Grant Schemes	FCW	Landowners	Ongoing
3. Funding / Resources			
3.1 Target grant aid such Woodland Grant Schemes and <i>Coppice for Butterflies</i> on areas known to be important for argent and sable.	FCW	Landowners, BC	Ongoing
4. Site Protection and Designation			
4.1 Seek to designate areas known to be important for argent and sable as SINCs.	GWT	MCC, SINC panel	2005-09
5. Habitat and Site Management			
5.1 Seek to retain all existing and potential sites in Monmouthshire with appropriate management. A 5-10 year coppice cycle of birch provides best habitat. Alternatively, sporadic cutting of woodland rides can help this species.	FCW, CCW	MCC	Ongoing
5.2 Where possible, ensure that recently-occupied habitat is appropriately managed by 2010 e.g. through site management agreements	FCW	GWT, CCW, MCC	2010

and funding incentives.			
5.3 Ensure that argent and sable is included on site management documents for all relevant SSSIs.	CCW		2008
6. Habitat Creation / Restoration			
6.1 Seek to increase the available habitat at known sites and attempt to link up fragmented sites.	FCW	GWT, CCW	At least 2 sites by 2008
7. Survey and monitoring			
7.1 Undertake Surveys to establish current distribution.	BC	MMBG	Ongoing
8. Information and databases			
8.1 Pass information gathered during survey and monitoring of this species to a central database (SEWBRc).	BC	MMBG, CCW	Ongoing
9. Communication -Advisory			
9.1 Advise landowners and managers of the presence of this species and the importance of beneficial management for its conservation.	MCC	CCW	Ongoing
10. Communication - Publicity			
10.1 Promote opportunities for the appreciation of the species and the conservation issues associated with its habitat. This should be achieved via articles, leaflets and within appropriate journals and events.	MCC	BC, FCW	Ongoing
11. Action Plan Process / Links to other Plans			
11.1 Consider argent and sable when preparing Habitat Action Plans for Woodland.	MCC	FCW, CCW	By March 2007

6. Abbreviations

BC	Butterfly Conservation
CCW	Countryside Council for Wales
FCW	Forestry Commission Wales
GWT	Gwent Wildlife Trust
MCC	Monmouthshire County Council
MCS	Monmouthshire Countryside Service
MDP	Monmouthshire Development Plans
MDC	Monmouthshire Development Control
MMBG	Monmouthshire Moth and Butterfly Group
NAWAD	National Assembly for Wales Agricultural Department
SEWBRc	South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre

WAG Welsh Assembly Government

AONB Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

7. References

Argent and Sable Wye Valley Survey Update 2005 David Green Butterfly Conservation Report S05-51

G. A. Neil Horton (1994) Monmouthshire Lepidoptera
Comma International Biological Systems.

Butterfly Conservation and DEFRA (2005) Argent and Sable fact sheet