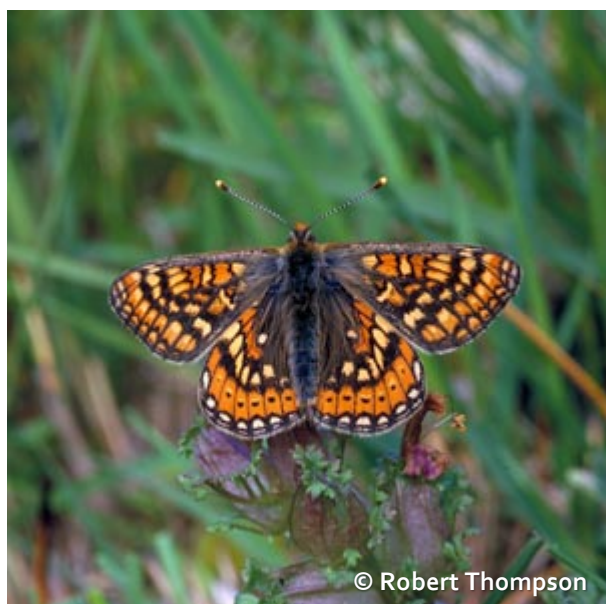


Marsh fritillary

Description

The marsh fritillary is one of the most brightly coloured fritillaries found in Britain and Ireland. It is a medium-sized colourful butterfly. The bright orange, yellow and white chequers on the wings are in contrast with the dark brown background. Both sexes look similar but the female is the larger. Once considered widespread, it has declined severely over the last century both here and in Europe.



The females lay their eggs in batches on the underside of their sole food plant — devil's-bit scabious. The first batch is usually the largest and may contain several hundred eggs, but subsequent batches are much smaller (c. 20 to 150). Marsh fritillary populations can fluctuate enormously in size from year to year. Populations can decline due to poor weather, unfavorable site conditions and parasitic wasps whose grubs feed inside the caterpillars of the marsh fritillary. Conversely, populations can recover quickly in good years.

Distribution

Found in open grassy habitats in County Down, especially wet grasslands and mires dominated by tussock-forming grasses and heath and mire vegetation devil's-bit scabious, grows in abundance. They are also found in County Antrim and Fermanagh.

Action

Research on the marsh fritillary is being carried out by Queen's University (Quercus) on behalf of Environment and Heritage Service (EHS)

Monitoring of colonies is being carried out by National Trust (NT), Ulster Wildlife Trust (UWT), Butterfly Conservation (BC) and EHS

A Marsh Fritillary Action Group for Northern Ireland formed in February 2003 to draw up a conservation strategy

Eight breeding colonies were recorded in 2005, seven of which are in ASSIs and the eighth colony is a UWT Nature Reserve managed for the species.

Further Information

<http://www.habitas.org.uk/priority/species.asp?item=5567>

MLA Species Champion

