



Adonis blue - *Polyommatus bellargus*

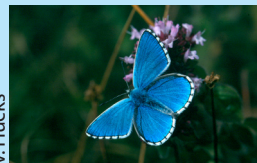
This beautiful blue butterfly, the logo of the Kent Wildlife Trust, is characterised by the brilliant blue wings of the male; the females are brown and far less noticeable. Both male and female have black lines on the wings that extend into the white fringes, unlike similar species such as the common blue (*Polyommatus icarus*). Adults may be found in May to early June, and again in August and September.

The favoured habitat of the adonis blue is dry, chalk or limestone grassland with short turf (below 4 cm) and an abundance of its foodplant, horseshoe vetch (*Hippocrepis comosa*). Being on the northernmost limit of its European range in the UK, the adonis blue needs warmth, so south facing slopes and sheltered hollows or quarries are preferred.

The adult females lay their eggs on the underside of small specimens of the foodplant. The caterpillars of the adonis blue are green, and in common with other members of the blue butterfly family, Lycaenidae, are somewhat slug-shaped. While feeding on the foodplant, the caterpillars are usually protected by ants, mostly the red ant (*Myrmica sabuleti*) and the small black ant (*Lasius*

alienus). The ants obtain secretions from special “honey” glands on the caterpillar. They protect the caterpillars, even going so far as to bury them at night. The ants may continue to look after the caterpillars even into the pupal stage.

With specific habitat requirements, and a tendency to rarely stray far from the colony, the adonis blue can become extinct in an area as a result of a slight change in grassland management, and may take a long time to colonise new areas of suitable habitat.



V. Hucks

The adonis blue has declined over the last 200 years, becoming extinct from several counties of southern England. The most severe decline was in the 1950s and 1960s with an estimated 90% decline in the number of colonies to 1981. Since the 1980s, there has been a partial recovery, particularly in Dorset and Wiltshire. The species is classified as Nationally Scarce, is protected from sale under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and is a UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority species.



V. Hucks

Within Kent, the adonis blue became extinct from most of the North Downs between the 1950s and 1980s. As with the national trend, it has undergone a partial recovery since then, recolonising sites such as Wye Downs National Nature Reserve. The species is scarce in the county, so is listed in the Kent Red Data Book.

The main threats to the adonis blue are inappropriate grassland management, particularly resulting from changes in livestock or rabbit population density, and loss of unimproved calcareous grasslands. Combined with the species' low dispersal capabilities, the fragmentation of remaining habitat presents a severe risk to the butterfly's continuing presence in an area.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Butterfly Conservation: www.butterfly-conservation.org
 'The Butterfly Conservation is the UK charity taking action to save butterflies, moths and their habitats'

UK Biodiversity Action Plan:
www.ukbap.org.uk/ukplans.aspx?ID=433

Environment Agency: www.environment-agency.gov.uk

English Nature: www.english-nature.org.uk

Kent Wildlife Trust: www.kentwildlife.org.uk

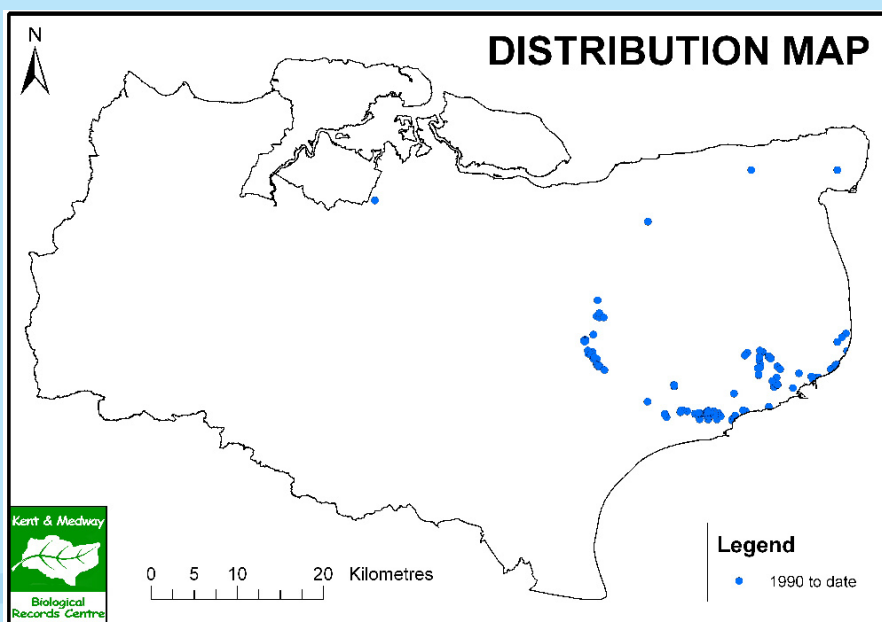
Kent Biodiversity Action Plan: www.kentbap.org.uk

The Kent Red Data Book, available from Kent County Council: www.kent.gov.uk/biodiversity

Kent Landscape Information System:
www.kent.gov.uk/klis

Kent and Medway Biological Record Centre:
www.kmbrc.org.uk

Most of the sites for the adonis blue in Kent are now protected and/or being managed for this species, and some sites are being returned to suitable habitat, such as Lydden Temple Ewell where scrub is being cleared to restore suitable habitat for adonis blue and other rare species. However, with the increasing urban development in Kent there is still a risk that fragmentation of habitat and inappropriate management could render this attractive butterfly a yet rarer sight than it is at present.



Data courtesy of John Maddocks, Butterfly Conservation