



## PRESS RELEASE

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# European butterflies under increasing threat from habitat loss and climate change

A new study shows that European butterflies are under increasing threat from a multitude of factors but especially habitat loss and the warming climate. The new Red List of European butterflies, just published by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), shows that the number of species threatened with extinction in Europe has increased from 37 to 65 (73%) since the last assessment just over 10 years ago. One species, the Madeiran Large White, *Pieris wollastoni*, a species that was restricted to the island of Madeira (Portugal) is now officially classified as extinct. It has not been reported since 1986, despite detailed searches.

The study also found that over one quarter (28.3%, 125 species) are now threatened or close to being so (Near Threatened) in Europe as a whole and almost one-third (30.9%) in the EU27. The situation is even worse when it comes to endemic species for which Europe has a unique responsibility with over 40% of Europe's endemic butterflies now threatened or close to being so.

The biggest threats to butterflies in Europe now and in the past are habitat loss and degradation. These have been caused by agricultural intensification, wetland drainage, land abandonment and overgrazing from livestock. As a result of these changes, many species are now suffering from the consequences of habitat fragmentation, which greatly increases the chances of local extinction.

However, a major new threat has severely affected European butterflies in the last decade: the warming climate. The new assessment found that 52% (34) of all threatened species in Europe are threatened by climate change and this number is expected to grow in coming years. Although the warming climate has allowed some widespread species to spread north, it is having a devastating effect on certain species in both the far north and far south of Europe as well as in the high mountains. Species that live solely on mountain tops are especially threatened as they need to move uphill as their habitats get warmer, but in doing so run out of space to breed. In the mountain ranges of southern Spain for example, the Critically Endangered Nevada Grayling, *Pseudochazara williamsi*, and the Endangered Zullich's Blue, *Agriades zullichi*; Sierra Nevada Blue, *Polyommatus golgus*; and Andalusian Anomalous Blue, *Polyommatus violetae*, are all European endemics severely threatened by the changing climate.

In the northern Alpine/Boreal zones of Scandinavia warmer and drier conditions are allowing scrub to spread and encroach on sensitive bog and tundra habitats. Eight species are now classed as Endangered as a result, many appearing in the Red List for the first time (e.g. Arctic Blue, *Agriades aquilo*; Freyja's Fritillary, *Boloria freija*; Arctic Grayling, *Oeneis bore* and Arctic Ringlet, *Erebia disa*).

In the Mediterranean region, species are increasingly threatened by extreme drought and wildfires. This is threatening several endemic species that are confined to islands such as the Critically Endangered Karpathos Grayling, *Hipparchia christenseni* (on Karpathos), as well as the Endangered Canary Brimstone, *Gonepteryx cleobule* (Tenerife, La Gomera, La Palma); La Palma Grayling, *Hipparchia tilosi* (La Palma).

Other growing threats that require further research include nitrogen deposition and new pesticides such as neonicotinoids, which persist in the environment.

Dr Martin Warren, one of the lead authors of the report said “European butterflies are threatened like never before, echoing the mounting crisis facing wildlife. Urgent action is now needed to save a large number of species from extinction. Many of them are threatened from habitat changes due to the warming climate, which will be hard to stop, but by ensuring their habitats are managed as well as possible, and populations are large and robust, they stand a chance. Others can be saved from extinction by preventing wildfires which can obliterate habitats for years.”

Dr Sam Ellis, another lead author, said “The new study paints a bleak picture for European butterflies. I and others in Butterfly Conservation Europe will be working to take all necessary measures to save as many threatened species as we can. We are already starting targeted surveys to map exactly where some of the most threatened species occur so that conservation measures can be planned and implemented (e.g. Nevada Grayling, Sardinian Blue). We desperately need more resources to carry out surveys, conduct research on how to mitigate changes and to take conservation action to improve the condition of the habitats on which butterflies depend.”

Dr Chris van Swaay, who led most of the analysis said “We now have much higher quality data than in previous assessments thanks to the many butterfly observations recorded by Europe’s butterfly enthusiasts and to the European Butterfly Monitoring Scheme, which gathers and analyses monitoring data from across most European countries. The new Red List is thus based on robust data on the status and trends of European butterflies.”

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#### Notes for the editors

1. Butterfly Conservation Europe is an umbrella body that co-ordinates and encourages the conservation of butterflies, moths and their habitats across Europe. It comprises a network of 52 organisations from 39 countries. For details see: [www.bc-europe.eu](http://www.bc-europe.eu)
2. The report entitled European Red List of Butterflies is published by the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), 64 Boulevard Louis Schmidt, 1040 Brussels, Belgium [brussels@iucn.org](mailto:brussels@iucn.org); [www.iucn.org/resources/publications](http://www.iucn.org/resources/publications)  
  
Full reference: Van Swaay, C., Warren, M., Ellis, S., Clay, J., Bellotto, V., Allen, D.J. and Trottet, A. (2025). Measuring the pulse of European biodiversity using the Red List. European Red List of Butterflies. Brussels, Belgium: European Commission. [doi.org/10.2779/935927](https://doi.org/10.2779/935927)
3. Photos of species are available from the above contacts or by email request to: [martin.warren@bc-europe.eu](mailto:martin.warren@bc-europe.eu) or [sam.ellis@bc-europe.eu](mailto:sam.ellis@bc-europe.eu)
4. The [International Union for Conservation of Nature](http://www.iucn.org) (IUCN) is a global organization dedicated to nature conservation and sustainable development. It acts as a bridge between governments, NGOs, and other stakeholders to promote biodiversity and sustainable practices. IUCN is the world's oldest and largest global environmental organization, with a history spanning over 70 years.
5. The [European Butterfly Monitoring Scheme](http://www.bceurope.eu) gathers data from 22 countries, all gathered using the same standardised protocols (such as butterfly transects or 15-minute counts). The results are used to produce the [European Grassland Butterfly Indicator](http://www.bceurope.eu) which is one of the measures used to track biodiversity change in Europe.