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Butterfly populations flying high at Porton Down

Butterflies are thriving on Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) land at Porton Down despite the floods last summer.

The number and variety of rare species such as the heath butterfly, dingy skippers, marsh fratillaries and grizzled skippers have increased alongside common farmland butterflies.

The population surge is due to a reseeded programme carried out by Dstl where arable field margins were sown with combinations of seeds. Pollen and nectar, grass and flower and, surprisingly, grass only seed mixtures were all shown to be very attractive to butterflies.

A three-year study revealed that in 2005, before reseeded began, 211 butterflies from 14 different species were present on the land. This rose to 6,980 butterflies from 26 different species, after reseeded in the summer of 2006.

In 2007, 1,145 butterflies of 24 different species were recorded, showing a significant increase on 2005 despite very poor conditions during the wet summer months.

Stuart Corbett, conservation officer at Dstl, said: "Excitingly, more rare Biodiversity Action Plan species appeared – dingy skippers and marsh fratillaries in May and grizzled skippers in June. The presence of marsh fratillaries on an arable margin was totally unexpected and led to the discovery of a new population at Porton Down.

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Notes to editors,

Dstl

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