



# THE STATUS OF THE CHALK CARPET *SCOTOPTERIX BIPUNCTARIA* (PROUT) IN BRITAIN AND AN APPEAL FOR SURVEY EFFORT IN 2007

by Tony Davis

## INTRODUCTION

Chalk Carpet is a Nationally Scarce (Nb) species which is listed in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan as a Priority Species. At the time it was “generally considered to have declined on downland and is unlikely to be under-recorded” (UK Biodiversity Group 1999). The distribution map produced in Parsons *et al.* (2005), showed that Chalk Carpet was recorded from 65 10km squares in the period 1999–2004, during a period when the species was highlighted for survey, compared to 98 10km squares from the period 1980 to c.1999. Whilst the recent recording period is much shorter, there was more intensive recording of UK BAP Priority Species during this period, and a number of species were found in more squares during 1999–2004 than in the previous 20 years.



**Chalk Carpet** *Scotopterix bipunctaria* (Photo: D. Hoare, Butterfly Conservation).

As a consequence of this perceived further decline, Butterfly Conservation has co-ordinated targeted surveys during 2005/06 with the help of many volunteer recorders. Unfortunately the results of this survey effort have not resolved whether the moth has genuinely declined or is just poorly recorded due to insufficient coverage.

Chalk Carpet was listed as a target species for National Moth Night on 9 July 2005, but based on the results it appears that this date may have been too early throughout most of its range, the only received records being from the Isle of Wight and the coasts of Dorset and Glamorgan. It has therefore been decided to promote the recording of Chalk Carpet again on this year's National Moth Night, which will be held on 11 August. Further to this, we also encourage recorders to search for this species throughout its flight period so that as many former sites as possible can be checked.

## HABITAT AND SEARCH METHODOLOGY

This species has been widely recorded on chalk and limestone sites throughout much of England and Wales. Typical habitat ranges from coastal cliffs to disused quarries and other disturbed sites, although it can also be found on relatively undisturbed calcareous grassland sites. The larval foodplants are listed by Skinner (1998) as bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus* spp., other trefoils, and clovers *Trifolium* spp.



**Habitat of Chalk Carpet** *Scotopteryx bipunctaria*. Portland, Dorset (Photo: M. Parsons, Butterfly Conservation).

In areas where there is good coverage of former sites there is an indication that the greatest declines may have occurred at grassland and coastal dune sites. In a survey of 24 sites on the South Downs in Sussex during 2006, David Bangs (pers. comm.) only found the moth in disused chalk pits or along steep incised bostal paths (ancient trackways).

The moth flies during July and August and is easily disturbed during the day, which is the most frequently used survey method. However, it may be that it is most easily found by this method when there is a strong population. When disturbed it generally flies a few metres before landing again. In flight it appears quite grey and is unlikely to be confused with many other species apart from Treble-bar *Aplocera plagiata* and Lesser Treble-bar *A. efformata*. These species are found in the same habitat as the Chalk Carpet; consequently it is necessary to either net the moth or follow it

until it lands so that identification can be confirmed. Chalk Carpet comes freely to both actinic and MV light. If attempting to flush the species by day, care should obviously be taken on cliff and quarry sites as they are inherently dangerous.

Butterfly Conservation have produced a species factsheet which can be downloaded from <http://www.butterfly-conservation.org/conservation/defrafactsheets/index.php>

## CURRENT DISTRIBUTION AND STATUS

In 2005/2006, Butterfly Conservation encouraged surveys for the Chalk Carpet. During this two-year period records were received from 68 10km squares (see Figure 1). These included records from several new sites in relatively well-recorded parts of the country, emphasising how poorly studied calcareous grassland can be. The squares in which the species was found during this period are listed below. Records from 2006 are in bold.

SK17	SH25	S080	SP35	SP46	SP80	SP92	SS48	SS87	ST06	ST43
ST45	<b>ST52</b>	<b>ST55</b>	<b>ST57</b>	<b>ST60</b>	ST70	ST81	ST88	ST90	ST91	<b>ST92</b>
<b>ST94</b>	<b>SU02</b>	<b>SU23</b>	SU67	SX85	<b>SY07</b>	<b>SY18</b>	<b>SY19</b>	<b>SY28</b>	<b>SY39</b>	<b>SY48</b>
SY49	<b>SY59</b>	SY66	SY67	<b>SY68</b>	SY77	SY78	<b>SY87</b>	SY88	<b>SY97</b>	<b>SY98</b>
<b>SZ07</b>	<b>SZ08</b>	<b>SZ28</b>	<b>SZ38</b>	<b>SZ47</b>	<b>SZ48</b>	<b>TL02</b>	<b>TL35</b>	<b>TL45</b>	<b>TQ01</b>	<b>TQ10</b>
<b>TQ15</b>	<b>TQ21</b>	<b>TQ25</b>	<b>TQ30</b>	<b>TQ31</b>	<b>TQ35</b>	<b>TQ50</b>	<b>TQ66</b>	<b>TQ76</b>	<b>TR13</b>	<b>TR23</b>
<b>TR34</b>	<b>TV59</b>									

## 2007 SURVEY

A table showing all the sites and 10km squares for which there are known records of Chalk Carpet has been placed on the Atropos website [www.atropos.info](http://www.atropos.info). Some of the information is rather vague, and any further information from local recorders would be gratefully received. Full grid references are available for some sites, and further information can be obtained from the author. If readers who do not have access to the Internet would like information about their local area they are welcome to contact the author. The table will be updated during the flight period so that recorders can ascertain whether a site they are planning to visit has been checked.

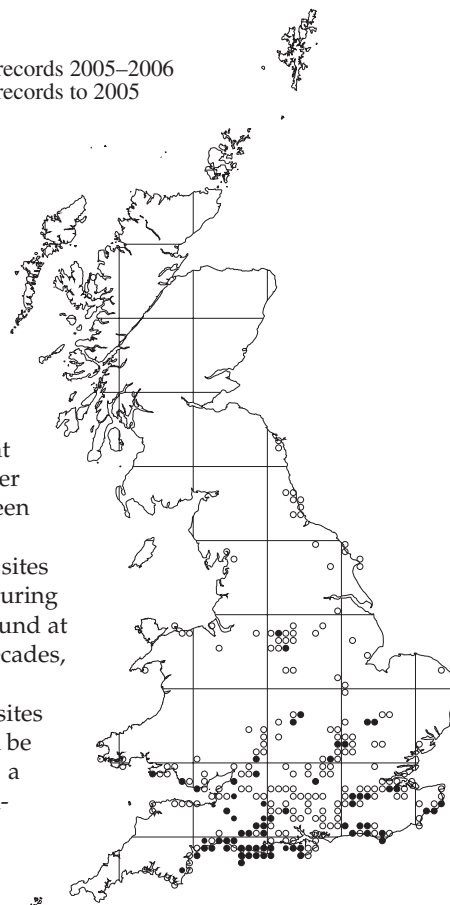
Do not be discouraged from looking at sites where the most recent record is very old. During the most recent survey Chalk Carpet was found at a number of sites with no record for many decades, or with no previous records at all.

We hope that as many as possible of the sites and 10km squares with previous records can be surveyed during 2007 so that we can gain a better understanding of the status and conservation needs of the Chalk Carpet. It would be extremely helpful if records could be sent in as soon as possible after they are made so that we do not ask people to duplicate recording effort. Please send records to [tdavis@butterfly-conservation.org](mailto:tdavis@butterfly-conservation.org) or by telephone to Butterfly Conservation headquarters on 01929 400209.

The information that we require is:

- Site name
- Grid reference (to 1km square at least, although more accurate grid references are welcome)
- Date recorded
- Number recorded
- Name of recorder and contact details
- Any interesting observations regarding the habitat
- Method
- Information about unsuccessful searches would also be useful.

- All records 2005–2006
- All records to 2005



**Figure 1.** Distribution map highlighting 2005/06 records of Chalk Carpet *Scotopteryx bipunctaria*.

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## REFERENCES

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