



## Norfolk naturalists return rare blue butterfly to its former home Mark Collins

On 18<sup>th</sup> June 2023 naturalists translocated 35 Silver-studded blue butterflies from Buxton Heath to their former haunt at Broadland Country Park (BCP), near Horsford, after an absence of more than 70 years. This lovely but scarce and delicate species has been lost from more than 80% of its former habitats in the past century as heathland was converted to forestry and housing. It is currently found at only four Norfolk locations.



Silver-studded Blue (m)  
Images / *Hans Watson*



Dave Weaver, Alan Dawson & Mark Collins  
preparing butterflies for translocation

The site at BCP was the original source of butterflies introduced to Horsford Rifle Range, Buxton Heath and Kelling Heath, but the original population was destroyed in the 1950s when plantation forestry took over. With the trees now removed, heather and black ants (*Lasius niger*), which the butterflies need to complete their life-cycle, have returned, and the species should once again thrive in its former home.

The project involved several partners. This is a protected species, and we had permission from Natural England and vital support from the Norfolk Wildlife Trust, who manage Buxton Heath, and Butterfly Conservation, which has unrivalled experience of such translocations.

The ants protect the caterpillars from predators and parasites, taking them down into their nests, where they pupate and over-winter before emerging as adults in June. A detailed survey was done to ensure that the ants were present in good numbers, and the heather was in good condition for the nectar-feeding adults, but it will be a while before we know whether the re-introduction has fully succeeded. Monitoring at the Park will continue for at least five years.

BCP was established by Broadland District Council just a few years ago and, with careful management, will become important for nature recovery and biodiversity in Norfolk. During a three-year research project with NNNS, more than 2000 species of plants and animals have been found, and the return of the iconic Silver-studded blue to its former home is a moment of great pride to the Society.

## Wendling Beck - an emerging opportunity for NNNS naturalists

Mark Collins

The Wendling Beck Environment Project is a pioneering initiative in central Norfolk that aims to reverse the damage that intensive agricultural techniques have caused since the 1950s. It's a diverse area covering about 8 sq km and involves several landowners, NGOs, government agencies and the nearby Gressenhall Museum, which itself is creating a new Environment Hub for education and research.

On 28<sup>th</sup> June, twenty NNNS recorders and officers met with the project leaders and toured the site to learn more. We heard that soil degradation through intensive blackcurrant and arable farming has caused carbon and soil fauna loss, accelerating the climate and biodiversity crises. But the processes are reversible if land-use management is changed. At



Wendling Beck, marginal land will be taken out of production, waterways will be connected and restored. They aim to maintain food production through regenerative practices and grass-fed cattle and sheep farming, which will also build habitat diversity. These practices, it is believed, can increase both financial and environmental resilience, encouraging other farmers to join in and bring back biodiversity and carbon storage at a landscape scale.



Already a range of valuable habitats are in transition, including heathland, parkland, meadows, fen, wet woodlands and chalk streams.

For farmers to support nature networks and nature recovery, new financing policies are needed, involving environmental credits that can sustain farming communities. But those improvements must be measurable. Policymakers will accept proxies, and the search is on for easy ways to estimate and record change over time. Survey transects, light-trapping and bioacoustics are in vogue. But when it comes to the crunch, hard evidence about species and populations is needed before and after the changes.