



ARGENT & SABLE

Rheumaptera hastata hastata

1. INTRODUCTION

The argent and sable is a striking black and white moth of wingspan 34-38mm that inhabits woods and heaths. It flies only during the daytime and is visible in-flight from some distance due to its prominent black and white chequered markings. The flight is fairly swift and erratic, often spanning the higher canopy. It prefers sunny and warm weather, but may be observed on overcast days if warm and humid. It is single brooded, flying in May and June, usually peaking in late May and into the first week of June.



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Argent and sable sites must contain a wealth of the larval foodplant, for woodland sites this is young birch. Many of the prime sites for this moth are afforded warmth and shelter by adjacent mixed stands of conifers and mature silver birch. The argent and sable needs a continuous supply of young birch ideally between 0.3-1.4 m and growing in open sunny situations on which to thrive. Birch coppicing is therefore essential for this species. Sympathetic ride management and an on-going programme of coppice restoration, to create large clearings and flight corridors along sunny rides, is of paramount importance. Overgrown and increasingly shaded woodlands pose the greatest threats to this species. It the birch-feeding race, *hastata*, that is covered by this action plan. Another race, *nigrescens*, feeds on bog myrtle in the north and west of Britain.

2. OUR OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

	Target
A. Establish monitoring of the last remaining Warwickshire site and collate results to determine population status.	2004
B. Check former sites to establish whether this species is still present.	2004
C. Maintain extent of habitat by encouraging the protection and appropriate management of the known sites.	2004
D. Publicise the habitat requirements of this moth to landowners and other interested parties and give advice on beneficial management.	2005
E. Develop a better understanding of the ecological requirements of this species and best management practices.	2010

ASSOCIATED HABITAT PLANS

- Woodlands

ASSOCIATED SPECIES PLANS**3. NATIONAL BAP OBJECTIVES & TARGETS**

This species is classified as Medium priority both regionally and nationally by Butterfly Conservation.

The immediate major objectives of the Butterfly Conservation National Biodiversity Action Plan are:

- *To halt the decline of this species in England*
- *To maintain viable networks of populations throughout its current range*
- *To conduct research into the exact habitat requirements for the argent and sable*
- *To investigate aspects of its larval ecology*
- *Long-term objective to restore its 1950 range*

4. CURRENT STATUS

The argent and sable is found locally in suitable woodland locations over the greater part of England. In recent decades it has undergone a dramatic decline due mainly to the cessation of coppicing. Waring (1997) classified this species as National Notable (i.e. found in less than 100 10-km squares nationally).

In the sub-region this species has undergone an alarming decline from the 1930's, when it was found at 15 sites, to the 1970's, when it was restricted to 2 sites. It is presently known to occur at only one site, Hay Wood, near Wroxall, where the population is feared to be very small and vulnerable. This site is owned and managed by Forest Enterprise, who maintain a ride system with young birch.

4.1 Legal and Policy Status

This species is not protected under the Wildlife and Countryside act 1981. Hay Wood, its only known location in the sub-region also has no legal protection.

4.2 Current Factors Affecting The Habitat

- **Lack of coppicing** leading to overgrown, shaded rides and clearings.
- **Deer browsing** there is a possibility that this is reducing the number of suitable saplings for egg-laying. Deer browsing may also be destroying larvae which occur in leaf spinnings.
- **Isolation** i.e the lack of suitable habitat in close proximity to existing colony.
- **Coniferisation of woodland** leading to a lack of birch.

5. CURRENT LOCAL ACTION

- Butterfly Conservation are in liaison with Forest Enterprise regarding future management of Hay Wood to benefit this species.

6. PROPOSED LOCAL ACTIONS (some dates amended - Core Steering Group - Feb 2008)

ACTION	Lead	Partners	By	Meets objective
Policy & Legislation				
PL1. Ensure that all relevant species policy is included in Local Planning Documents (see ODPM Planning Policy Statement PPS9).	LBAPSG	WWT BC WDC	FE 2005	D
Site / Species Safeguard & Management				
SM1. Develop and implement a management plan to benefit argente and sable at Hay Wood.	FE	WWT BC	2005	A
SM2. Seek to ensure that other sites with colonies have management plans which use Best Practice for argente and sable	WWT	BC WDC	FE 2004	B
SM3. Encourage the protection of suitable woodland in both present and past argente and sable sites.	BC	FE WDC	NE 2003 - 2015	C, D
Advisory				
A1. Circulate information to landowners to introduce management for argente and sable.	BC	WWT FE	2005	D

Research & Monitoring				
RM1. Survey former locations to see if species is still present.	BC	WWT FE	2004	B
RM2. Establish Monitoring at Hay Wood to assess population size and determine extent of colony.	BC	WWT FE	2004	A
RM3. Promote and support ecological research to assist long-term conservation of this species.	BC	WWT FE	2010	E
Communication, Education & Publicity				
CP1. Raise awareness amongst landowners of potential sites of the decline of argant and sable and its conservation management requirements.	BC	WWT FE NE	2003 - 2015	D

Abbreviations: BC – Butterfly Conservation, NE – Natural England., FE – Forestry Enterprise, LBAPSG- Local Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group, WDC – Warwick District Council, WWT – Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.

7. REFERENCES (also see LBAP Bibliography web page)

Waring, P. (1997) *Annotated List of the Macro Moths recorded in the British Isles.*

8. FURTHER INFORMATION (see separate Links web page for links to web sites)

UK Biodiversity Action Plan no. 549
Butterfly Conservation

9. CONTACT

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