

## Butterfly Conservation helped by Warwickshire Highways proves successful

In 2006 the Warwickshire Branch of Butterfly Conservation and Warwickshire County Council Highways Department entered into a unique partnership to conserve Britain's smallest butterfly, the Small Blue.

The Small Blue has declined dramatically in range; nationally by 30% and in Warwickshire by 83%. Now only 3 colonies remain in the whole of the 6 counties that make up the West Midlands. All of these remaining colonies are found in the Southam area of Warwickshire.



In an attempt to reverse this decline volunteers from the Warwickshire Branch, supported by Barclays Bank, planted 200 kidney vetch plant plugs on both sides of the Southam bypass in the spring of 2006. Kidney vetch is the only plant that the Small Blue caterpillar will eat. To further complicate things, the adult butterfly will only lay its eggs on the kidney vetch flowers because the caterpillars only eat the more nutritious flower seeds.

Since the planting took place the number of flowering kidney vetch plants have been monitored on the bypass. Unfortunately, due to drought and rabbits it appeared that only a few plants survived. However, it takes 2 years before the young kidney vetch plants flower and the number of flowering plants has gradually increased. This year a mass of over 400 flowering kidney vetch plants were found. It is now believed that the Southam bypass is suitable for the Small Blue to colonise and it is predicted that it will do so within the next year or two. If this prediction proves correct then this will be a fantastic achievement and will be a living testimony to a successful working partnership.

Andrew Savage, County Highways Contract & Policy Manager said "It is very satisfying to help on this local ecology project which has proved successful in such a short time. Highway verges provide a lot of habitat for flora and fauna. It seems the local conditions were ideal for very specific plants and butterflies to prosper."

For further information visit [www.warwickshire-butterflies.org.uk](http://www.warwickshire-butterflies.org.uk)