



Press Release: 25th August 2020

For Immediate Release

New Hope for Rare Butterfly in South Wales

A new project by the Initiative for Nature Conservation Cymru (INCC) aims to prevent the extinction of the rare Marsh Fritillary butterfly in Llantrisant, South Wales. The first of its kind project will rear a small number of caterpillars so that thousands of butterflies can be released back into the local landscape.

Iolo Williams – TV Naturalist and Broadcaster, said: *“If we are to truly reverse the decline of nature in Wales it is clear that we need additional approaches to nature conservation. It’s great to see such positive action for the iconic marsh fritillary butterfly and to think that although this might be the first project of its kind in Wales, it won’t be the last”.*

Several local extinctions of the Marsh Fritillary have already taken place across Wales, and many more populations teeter on the brink of survival. One such population is that of the upper Ely landscape, around the towns and villages of Llantrisant and Tonyrefail.

The butterfly depends on a network of suitable marshy grassland habitat with a plentiful supply of the caterpillar’s food plant Devil’s-bit Scabious. These marshy grassland habitats are best managed by cattle as they create the ideal conditions for the caterpillar as well as a plentiful supply of nectar rich wildflowers for the adult butterflies to feed on.

The loss of suitable habitat in the past has meant that the butterfly’s population has declined to such an extent that it is now only found at just a handful of sites in the landscape. In recent years, a partnership of graziers and conservationists has gone to great lengths to restore the Marsh Fritillary’s habitat, but despite all the efforts the butterfly is still confined to just a small

number of sites and are unable to recolonise the restored habitats.

Huw Rees – Local Grazier and Llantrisant Town Trust Trustee, said: *“It’s great to be part of such a positive conservation project and to know that all our efforts to manage the grasslands with wildlife in mind are paying off”.*

As well as helping to save the local Marsh Fritillary population, the project also aims to undertake research and provide evidence so that other species conservation work can be benefitted in future.

Rob Parry – Chief Executive of INCC, said: *“Local partner organisations, landowners and graziers have all played a vital role in recent decades to ensure that the marsh fritillary has been able to survive in the landscape. I hope the project can act as a catalyst for even more habitat restoration in the area, benefiting the butterfly and countless other plants and animals in the landscape. We are looking forward to working with the partnership and the local community to build on the good work already achieved”.*

INCC are aiming to raise an initial £60,000 to help cover the costs of this eight year project and to make the population reinforcement a real success. If you would like to learn more about the project or are able to donate toward the project’s cost, please visit the INCC website www.natureconservation.wales.

If you want to support INCC’s vital conservation work, you can donate via:

JustGiving™

and search for:

Bringing Back the Marsh Fritillary

-ENDS-

Link to our Just Giving fundraising page -

<https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/marshfritillarybutterfly>

Notes for editor:

For further information please contact – Robert Jones Parry, Chief Executive Officer. Initiative for Nature Conservation Cymru (INCC). rob.parry@incc.wales / 07821397625.

INCC website: www.natureconservation.wales

Photos: Large sized available on request



Marsh Fritillary butterfly. (photo credit Vaughn Matthews)



Marsh Fritillary caterpillars in their distinctive larval web. (photo credit Robert Parry)

About INCC

Vision:

‘A Wales with more wildlife in more places, created by a society that intrinsically values the natural world’.

The Initiative for Nature Conservation Cymru (INCC) is a wildlife charity established in 2018 to challenge environmental decision makers to do more for wildlife and nature conservation in Wales.

We achieve this through community engagement and education, research, species and habitat conservation and speaking out for wildlife in Wales.

The reasons for the declines and losses in biodiversity are both numerous and complex, but INCC believes that at the heart of the problem is that wildlife in Wales has lost its voice. Few communities in Wales today fully realise the very desperate situation wildlife is now in, or the factors that continue to cause the losses. Without knowledge of the situation, there can be no drive to put things right at either the public or political level.

INCC's unique role in the nature conservation sector in Wales is to speak out for all wildlife, to be the voice that is needed and to tell the story from wildlife's point of view.

About Marsh Fritillary (*Euphydryas aurinia*)

The Marsh Fritillary Butterfly has undergone widespread and catastrophic declines throughout much of its natural European range and is now thought to be among the most threatened butterflies in Europe (Hula *et al* 2004). The species has retreated from over 60% of its European range (Hula *et al* 2002) and extinct from several previously occupied countries including Belgium and the Netherlands (Warren 1991).

Similar trends for the U.K. have been witnessed with the species undergoing a 55% reduction in range between 1970 and 2000 (Asher *et al* 2001). As a consequence, the Marsh Fritillary is listed under Annex II of the EC Habitats and Species Directive as well as the Bern Convention and fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.