

Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan



Argent & Sable (*Rheumaptera hastata*)



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The Argent & Sable is a very striking black and white day-flying moth which is now known to occur on sites with birch, Bog Myrtle and willow. It has recently undergone considerable decline in Britain largely as a result of changes in woodland management.

There had been no known recent records for Argent & Sable in Shropshire until this moth was confirmed on two sites as a result of targeted survey in 2003. This was a surprising find as one of these sites (Whixall Moss*) is regularly visited by Lepidopterists. Further research work in Shropshire during 2005 has now identified three sites for this species including one site (Wem Moss) where Argent & Sable are using both birch and Bog Myrtle as larval foodplants.

*Note – Whixall Moss is part of the Fenn's, Whixall & Bettisfield Mosses NNR.

1 Objectives and Targets

1.1 Objectives

- A. Protect, enhance and monitor the existing populations of Argent & Sable in Shropshire.
- B. Encourage research into the ecological requirements of this species in Shropshire.
- C. Increase survey effort directed at this species to see if it is present on other Shropshire sites.
- D. Increase awareness of the status and needs of Argent & Sable in Shropshire through communication and education.

1.2 Targets

- Maintain and enhance the existing Argent & Sable populations on three sites in north Shropshire (Whixall Moss, Wem Moss and a privately owned site) and monitor them annually until 2015.

Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan

2 Current Status

2.1 Importance

The Argent & Sable is widespread in Europe and its range includes Siberia, Korea, China, Japan, Iceland and North America. In Europe it occurs from Spain and the Alps to northernmost Scandinavia. In Britain it is has recently undergone significant widespread decline and there are now only a handful of sites in England where it is regularly recorded.

2.2 Trends

A species that was formerly fairly widespread in England with losses in the last century attributed to changes in woodland management. As the records for Shropshire are very recent, no data on trends can be provided although it may well be under-recorded.

2.3 Population and Distribution

Although there have been some thinly scattered records for Argent & Sable in the West Midlands region over the last 15 years this moth has recently disappeared from a number of areas including the Wyre Forest and several woods in south Herefordshire (e.g. Haugh Wood). Five Staffordshire sites for Argent & Sable were only discovered in 2005.

3 Current Factors Affecting the Species

- The loss of birch regeneration on the edge of woods and rides in modern high forest systems due to the decline in coppicing and other active woodland management.
- Colonies surviving on the edges of conifer plantations are threatened by the lack of open areas and young birch as these plantations mature.
- Over-grazing by sheep on some sites in Scotland, preventing birch regeneration and impacting on Bog Myrtle stands.
- Loss of continuity of young birch and Bog Myrtle on sites where scrub is managed.

4 Current Action

4.1 Policy and Protection

- It is listed under the following category:
 - UKBAP Priority Species (1998)
- The three sites known Shropshire sites for Argent & Sable are all SSSI's

4.2 Management, Research and Survey

Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan

- Argent & Sable appear to have benefited from the management work carried out on the three Shropshire sites over the past few years and may continue to do so if a continuous supply of young birch and/or Bog Myrtle is maintained.
- Some limited research on the habitats of Argent & Sable on Whixall and Wem Mosses was carried out in 2005 but more is urgently needed. Shropshire and Staffordshire were the only English counties to record good numbers of Argent & Sable in 2005.

5. Key Habitats

- Shropshire Mosses and Heaths

6. Complementary Plans

UK	Argent & Sable SAP
Shropshire	Peat Bogs HAP
Shropshire	Lowland heathland HAP

Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan

7. Action Plan

Habitat / Species	Action code	Action text	Location of action	Start date	End date	Lead	Assisting
Argent & Sable	SHR ARS CA 01	Ensure that any advances in understanding regarding appropriate management for Argent & Sable is communicated to managers of the three known sites.	Wem Moss, Whixall Moss & Privately owned site	2006	-	BC	
Argent & Sable	SHR ARS CP 01	Produce at least one press release on the status of the Argent & Sable in Shropshire and how to record and conserve it by 2010.	Shropshire	2008	2010	BC	SWT
Argent & Sable	SHR ARS FR 01	Recruit at least two more volunteers to survey for Argent and Sable by 2010.	North Shropshire	2006	2010	BC	SWT, FSC
Argent & Sable	SHR ARS SM 01	Achieve favourable management for Argent & Sable at Wem Moss by 2015.	Wem Moss	2006	2015	SWT	NE, BC
Argent & Sable	SHR ARS SM 02	Achieve favourable management for Argent & Sable at Whixall Moss by 2015.	Whixall Moss	2006	2015	BC	
Argent & Sable	SHR ARS SM 03	Achieve favourable management for Argent & Sable for Privately Owned Site by 2015.	Privately owned site	2006	2015	NE	BC
Argent & Sable	SHR ARS SM 04	Identify one more site close to existing colonies where more favourable management could be carried out to encourage colonisation by Argent & Sable by 2010.	North Shropshire	2006	2010	BC	NE, SWT, FC,
Argent & Sable	SHR ARS SU 01	Undertake annual monitoring for Argent and Sable at the three known sites until 2010.	Wem Moss, Whixall Moss & Privately owned site	2006	2010	BC	SWT, FSC

Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan

Key to organisations

BC	Butterfly Conservation
FC	Forestry Commission
NE	Natural England
SWT	Shropshire Wildlife Trust
SBP	Shropshire Biodiversity Partnership
FSC	Field Studies Council

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Plan last revised: May 2008 by Fran Lancaster, Biodiversity Support Officer, Shropshire Council.

NB. Hardcopy correct as of 18.03.2009