

Marsh Fritillary Butterfly

Lifecycle

The Marsh Fritillary Butterfly (*Euphydryas aurinia*) is a rare European species and is protected under the Habitats Directive. It is important that the species is regularly monitored so that population trends can be documented and that conservation measures can be put in place to aid in its survival.

Management

Marsh Fritillaries require an open grassy habitat with an abundance of Devil's Bit Scabious. The ideal sward height is from 12-25cm tall with the presence of structured vegetation that provides localised protection from the weather. Habitat condition assessments are undertaken at Marsh Fritillary breeding sites annually and involve measuring sward height and structure, the cover of Devil's Bit Scabious, evidence of grazing and assessment of scrub encroachment. The results advise on any management needed to ensure successful breeding.

The Marsh Fritillary butterfly can be seen on the wing between May and June each year.



Image: C.O'Connell



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Devil's Bit Scabious the food plant of the Marsh Fritillary caterpillar.



Image: C.O'Connell



Image: K. Geraghty



Image: R. Duggan

The female butterfly lays eggs on the underside of Devil's Bit Scabious leaves soon after she emerges in mid May.

By the end of April the caterpillars are now spiky and black. They begin to disperse from the web.



Image: J.Harding



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The eggs hatch in July and August and the tiny buff coloured caterpillars live in communal webs.

At the end of August the larvae spin a communal web in which hibernation takes place.



Image: R. Duggan

Grazing Donkeys manage the height and structure of the vegetation keeping it suitable for breeding butterflies.



Image: K. Geraghty



Image: K. Geraghty

Volunteers help to count the larval webs monitoring the population of this rare butterfly.

Your Support is helping Ireland's Only Protected Butterfly