



Butterfly Conservation

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

Position statement on neonicotinoid pesticides

Background

Neonicotinoid pesticides are widely used in agriculture to control insect damage to crops. They are a systemic pesticide used as seed dressing or soil treatment and are thus passed throughout the plant tissues. Unlike many other pesticides, they are neurotoxins that act specifically on the nervous system of invertebrates.

There is growing concern among researchers, wildlife organisations, and the public that neonicotinoids are affecting wild bee and honeybee populations and possibly other insects, including butterflies and moths. Specifically, recent studies have shown that there might be sublethal effects (e.g. on foraging behaviour) that are not picked up by conventional testing. Research in the USA has demonstrated an impact on Monarch butterflies at very low levels of contamination.

Butterfly Conservation's position:

- BC supports responsible and sustainable farming practices.
- BC welcomes DEFRA's planned review of the evidence base, including the consideration of the impacts of alternative pest control strategies, and will closely examine the outcome.
- BC considers that recent scientific evidence is now sufficiently compelling that the current EU wide neonicotinoid pesticides ban should be expanded to cover all agricultural uses as a precaution (not just the ban on use in gardens and in flowering crops where there might be a high exposure to bees and other pollinators, as is currently the case). This ban should be reviewed regularly and lifted only if clear evidence becomes available that they cause no harm to non-target insects and other wildlife, or that alternative crop management practices might be more harmful.
- BC believes that there remains an urgent need for a major improvement in the regulation of all pesticides including thorough screening and independent research into their impact on biodiversity before they are approved for use. This research should include field trials of their use in practice as well as laboratory studies of direct mortality on a wide range of native, non-target invertebrate species.
- This issue highlights the importance of BC's monitoring of butterflies and moths in the wider countryside to contribute field data and evidence to the debate.
- BC will be monitoring new information on the subject as it becomes available and will update this position statement when more conclusive information becomes available.