



Ionian Butterfly Conservation's (IBC) butterfly and moth Conservation Strategy 2026.

This conservation strategy for the butterflies and moths (Lepidoptera) of the Ionian Archipelago, Greece, is based on a multi-faceted approach focusing on research, habitat protection, sustainable land use, and community engagement to counter threats like habitat loss, climate change impacts (such as wildfires), and poorly controlled development.

Butterflies and moths are considered flagship species that serve as crucial indicators of ecosystem health; when they are thriving, it suggests a healthy environment capable of providing the essential ecosystem services (like pollination) that underpin human economic and social well-being. Consequently, the state of butterfly populations acts as a direct proxy for overall biodiversity, reflecting the well-being of the natural world on a broader scale.

Strategy Overview & Goals

The overarching goal is to **maintain and enhance the biodiversity and population stability of Lepidoptera** across the Ionian Islands (including Corfu, Kefalonia, Zakynthos, Lefkada, and smaller islands), using butterflies as key **bio-indicators** of wider ecosystem health.

Much of this document is aspirational whilst in equal measure it is also grounded in the success of our original organisation, Corfu Butterfly Conservation. Whilst Ionian Butterfly Conservation aspires to conserve all lepidoptera, much of our initial focus will inevitably rest on butterfly species because of the ease of engaging the public with them and because scientific study is frequently easier with butterflies.

The Ionian Butterfly Conservation Strategy aims to maintain and enhance Lepidoptera biodiversity across the Greek Ionian Islands by addressing threats like habitat loss and climate change. Its approach is based on four main pillars: **intensive research and monitoring** (including a regional monitoring scheme and publishing a species atlas), **active habitat protection** (managing Natura 2000 sites and promoting sustainable olive grove and agricultural practices), **climate resilience** (exploring actions that may mitigate against the worst outcomes of climate change on butterfly populations) and **policy integration and community engagement** (informing spatial planning, managing wildfire risks, and promoting eco-tourism).

Our regional objectives have been designed to complement: Collins & Warren (2014) Recovery Strategy for European Butterflies, Butterfly Conservation Europe.

Research, Monitoring, and Data Collection

Robust, scientific data is the foundation for effective policy and action.

- **Establish a Regional Ionian Lepidoptera Monitoring Scheme - the Ionian Butterfly Survey:** Expand the successful model of the Corfu Butterfly Survey (CBS) to all major and minor Ionian islands.
 - **Action:** Implement standardized citizen science programs (e.g., transect walks and timed counts, like the European Butterfly Monitoring Scheme - eBMS) to track population trends, species distribution, and flight periods for butterflies and key moths.
 - **Deliverable:** In the longer term, publish a Comprehensive Ionian Butterfly and Moth Atlas's to map key species and their habitats, providing essential information for spatial planning.
- **Targeted Scientific Studies:** Fund research into specific threats and key species.
 - **Action:** Investigate the ecological requirements of endemic or threatened species (e.g., those on the IUCN Red List or species close to qualifying as Near Threatened), including their larval foodplants and nectar sources.
 - **Action:** Research the long-term impact of **wildfires**, excessive agricultural chemical use (insecticides/herbicides), and management of traditional olive groves on Lepidoptera communities.
 - **Action:** Examine the impact of climate change on the life history strategies of the Ionian lepidopteran species, to suggest adaptations to habitat management altering diversity and structure, to mitigate against the major impacts of variations in climate on vulnerable lepidopteran species.
- **Establish a Red List Status:** Collaborate with national and European conservation bodies (like IUCN and Butterfly Conservation Europe) to produce an updated, comprehensive Regional Red List Assessment for Ionian Lepidoptera.

Habitat Protection and Management

Conservation management should focus on preserving the diverse Mediterranean habitats essential for Lepidoptera life cycles.

- **Protect Core Habitats (SAC/Natura 2000 Sites):** Ensure existing protected areas effectively manage Lepidoptera habitats.
 - **Action:** Where possible, for sites designated under the EU Habitats Directive (Natura 2000), contribute to an update of the management plans to include specific "Dos and Don'ts" for butterfly and moth conservation (e.g., varying mowing dates, avoiding habitat uniformity).
- **Sustainable Agriculture and Land Use:** Encourage traditional, low-intensity farming practices.

- **Action:** Influence local agricultural practices by encouraging EU **Agri-Environment Schemes** that reward farmers for maintaining un-mown field margins, allowing native herbaceous foodplants to flourish, and delaying hay cutting until after pupation periods (April to July, depending on the species).
- **Action:** Promote **olive grove management** that encourages rotational **coppicing** or thinning in suitable areas to create sunny glades and open pathways, benefiting light-demanding species, and limits insecticide use to protect the species that rely on the ground vegetation beneath them.
- **Habitat Restoration and Creation:** Restore degraded areas.
 - **Action:** Map regional hotspots for butterfly diversity to isolate the environmental variables and management practices that sustain high population densities. These findings will be used to develop standardised "best practice" templates for habitat restoration in ecologically similar areas across the Ionian.
 - **Action:** Promote the creation of new butterfly-friendly landscapes by showcasing high-profile restoration projects delivered in partnership with strategic allies, such as the Ionian Environment Foundation.
 - **Action:** Launch and manage the **John Denne Butterfly Garden Competition**. This annual initiative is designed to mobilise the public as proactive stewards of biodiversity, transforming private gardens and public spaces into a network of "stepping-stone" habitats. The competition will incentivise the strategic use of nectar-rich ornamentals (e.g., *Buddleia davidii* and *Echium candicans*) alongside critical native larval foodplants. By rewarding designs that provide for both "wider countryside" generalists and high priority "habitat specialists," the program will enhance ecological connectivity across urbanized areas, fostering a resilient corridor network and deepening public understanding of lepidopteran habitat requirements.

Climate Change and Resilience

Address the growing threats from warming temperatures and extreme weather events, such as wildfires.

- **Wildfire Resilience Planning:**
 - **Action:** Integrate knowledge from post-fire butterfly monitoring into local disaster management plans, identifying areas of high recovery and high vulnerability.
 - **Action:** Explore the use of **controlled, small-scale burns** in fire-prone areas to reduce fuel load and create a mosaic of habitats, rather than allowing large, uncontrolled conflagrations.

- **Create Thermal Refuges:**

- **Action:** Integrate features like shaded areas, south-facing banks, and patches of scrub into managed grasslands and habitats to provide microclimate refuges where butterflies can thermoregulate during extreme heat events.

Policy Integration and Community Engagement

For long-term success, conservation must be integrated into local policy and involve the community.

- **Policy Integration:**

- **Action:** Use the findings from the Ionian Lepidoptera Atlas and Red List to directly inform **Local Spatial Planning and Environmental Impact Assessments** for new developments, ensuring key habitats are protected from overdevelopment.
- **Action:** Lobby local government to restrict the use of broad-spectrum pesticides in public spaces and urban green areas.

- **Education and Outreach:** Partner with local groups throughout the Ionian region to increase public awareness.

- **Action:** Expand and develop more **bilingual (Greek/English) educational programs**, specifically:
 - Hosting **educational events** for local youth. Children are captivated by butterflies, encouraging an interest in them can guide the development of environmentally sound behaviour and attitudes as children move into adulthood.
 - Create and distributing **informative materials** (posters, field guides) for schools and tourists to foster an appreciation for local species.
 - Organize activities for the **Festival of Butterflies**, to enhance public discourse on the conservation of local biodiversity.
 - Engage the public in **butterfly surveys** and other scientific research, to further increase robust evidence to justify our aims.
- **Action:** Promote **Eco-tourism** centred around butterfly watching, which can provide an economic incentive for habitat protection outside of the main tourist season.

- **Partnerships:**

- **Action:** Secure long-term funding through collaborations with the Ionian Environment Foundation, European bodies, and local businesses to ensure the sustainability of monitoring and habitat management efforts.

In conclusion

Given their importance, IBC urges the Greek government and all stakeholders in the Ionian region (including farmers, land managers, and Non-Governmental Organizations – NGOs) to collaborate effectively, to mobilise the necessary resources to conserve butterflies, moths and their habitats. More broadly, measurable success would be seen by the implementation of targeted actions that will definitively halt the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services and achieve clear ecosystem recovery. This long-term objective is seen as critical for securing the health of the natural world for current and future generations.

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