

Barberry Carpet Project in Crudwell

Did you know that one of Britain's rarest moths, the Barberry Carpet *Pareulype berberata*, is living in your parish? It is believed to be reduced to only 11 populations in Britain and its' stronghold is North Wiltshire. The Barberry Carpet used to be a far more common species in Britain and was widespread over southern England and found as far North as Yorkshire. It definitely won't eat your carpets as its' sole native food-plant is Common Barberry *Berberis vulgaris* which is no longer a common plant. Remaining colonies of the moth have become isolated from each other, populations have reduced, and the moth has become far more vulnerable to local extinctions. There are around 6 colonies in Wiltshire, a colony at Westonbirt Arboretum and more isolated colonies in Dorset and Oxfordshire. It is a Section 41 species (designated under the NERC Act, 2006) and is protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981. A licence is required to survey for the moth due to its' rarity. Thanks to Heritage Lottery funding, the Back from the Brink Project has been launched by Natural England which is providing funds to help conserve almost 100 of Britain's rarest species, the Barberry Carpet being one of these.

Butterfly Conservation and their volunteers have been working hard to conserve this species for many years but there is a real push now through this new Barberry Carpet Project to increase the available habitat for the moth. I have recently started with Butterfly Conservation as the Barberry Carpet Project officer and our aim is to plant out 3000 native Barberry bushes (*Berberis vulgaris*) at suitable sites around known colonies over the next 4 years. This sounds like a lot initially but when divided between the sites and the years, in reality we will have around 100 plants for the Crudwell area this winter. The closest known colonies to Crudwell are at Ashley and Long Newton so I'm really keen to try and link these colonies by finding suitable planting sites in between them. I would also like to spread out in the direction of Westonbirt to link with the colony there although that is more ambitious. I am really keen to hear from anybody who lives in our target areas and would welcome some planting on their land or in their own garden. The moth is capable of dispersal but I want to ensure that new plantings are less than a kilometre from each other in order to provide plenty of new areas or 'stepping stones' between the existing colonies..

If you would like to lend your support, the advantage is that Common Barberry is an attractive plant with beautiful orange/ red berries and attractive autumn colours. The bushes grow slowly and ideally need some aftercare so that they don't get swamped by competing vegetation. They do have spines like their cultivated cousins, and left to grow large they can reach 7 or 8 foot tall in hedgerows but it is possible to keep them much smaller. It is not just the Barberry carpet moth that will benefit as many other species including birds and small mammals feed on the berries and there are other rarities such as the Scarce Tissue moth that feed on the leaves.

Our plan is to start planting out the young bushes over the autumn and winter months and I am hopeful that I may find some willing local volunteers to help if I am lucky! The plants have been cultivated from seed collected at sites with strong wild populations of the moth and have been cultivated at Chester Zoo.

Anyone who is keen to help or who has potential planting locations in mind including their own garden, should contact me at fhaynes@butterfly-conservation.org or on 07483 039323.



1st instar larva



Photos by Fiona Haynes

