The Scotch Argus butterfly can be truly regarded as "Scotland's Butterfly" and can be found throughout large parts of mainland Scotland. When freshly emerged, the adults are a rich dark brown with a beautiful sheen. Males and females are similar and have prominent eyespots, which give the butterfly the second part of its name. (The Argus was a creature from Greek mythology with a hundred eyes).

**Distribution**

The Scotch Argus is common and widespread in the west of Scotland, the central Scottish Highlands, and around the Moray Firth, and also occurs on some islands, for example Skye, Mull and Arran. However, it is absent from intensively-managed farmland, such as large parts of Angus and Aberdeenshire, and from urban areas such as the Central Belt. It has been lost from parts of Dumfries and Galloway and the Borders.

In England the butterfly once occurred in Yorkshire, Durham and Northumberland, but now survives at just two sites in Cumbria. It is also found in central Europe, but is declining in several countries including Germany, Belgium and the Czech Republic.

**LIFE-CYCLE**

The adult butterfly is on the wing from mid-July until early September, although in some years it can be seen in early July. The Scotch Argus is the last butterfly of the season to emerge, a few weeks after two related butterflies, the Ringlet and Meadow Brown.
**Behaviour & Habitat**

The largest colonies are found in sunny, sheltered and damp habitats, for example tussocky, lightly-grazed grassland with scattered scrub, or open woodland. Newly re-stocked areas in conifer plantations can also provide temporary habitat.

Males and females spend much time basking and nectaring in order to acquire enough energy for flight. A wide range of flowers are visited for nectar, the most common being knapweed, devil’s-bit scabious, cross-leaved heath, ling and thistles.

The female lays her eggs singly in the undergrowth. The caterpillars emerge after a couple of weeks and are nocturnal, feeding on a variety of grasses such as purple moor-grass, fescues and tufted hair-grass. Feeding resumes in the Spring until late June, when pupation takes place in vegetation on the ground.

**Land Management**

The Scotch Argus is adapted to cool climates, but too much shade or exposure to the wind renders its habitats unsuitable. By selecting sunny, sheltered habitats, it makes the most of the summer sunshine and warmth.

The need for tussocky grassland may also be an adaptation to cool climates, the caterpillars spending the Winter protected in the heart of grass tussocks. It is known that even moderate levels of grazing can eliminate tussocks - and the butterfly. While it may seem easy enough to create and retain areas of sheltered, sunny, rank, damp grassland, the distribution of the butterfly will also be governed by its poor powers of dispersal.

Warm sunshine brings out the largest numbers of butterflies, but individuals can be seen flying in overcast conditions. Flight is slow, although both sexes are capable of bursts of faster flight. Neither sex flies far during their brief lifetime, a few hundred metres at most. The Scotch Argus can thus have difficulty colonising new areas, and may take a long time to recover from local extinction.

![Female Scotch Argus nectaring on knapweed](image)

**Management Summary**

**Ungrazed Woodlands**

- Glades should be large and rides should be wide, especially those running north-south, so they receive plenty of sunshine.
- Avoid unnecessary disruption to natural drainage patterns.
- Timber storage should be kept to the same areas each year, avoiding sunny areas rich in flowers.

**Grazed Woodlands and Grasslands**

- Very light grazing may be acceptable so long as it allows the development of tussocks.
- In grassland, scrub or tall hedges can provide valuable shelter.

**Ungrazed Grasslands and Wetland Edges**

- Occasional scrub removal may be required to maintain open, sheltered areas.

**Who To Contact For Advice**

- For grants information, contact your local Forestry Commission or Rural Affairs Department office.
- For management advice, contact your local Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group or Scottish Agricultural College.
- For information on butterflies and moths contact:
  - Butterfly Conservation
    Balallan House, Allan Park, Stirling FK8 2QG.
    Tel: 01786 447753
    Email: pkirkland@butterfly-conservation.org

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