

Current Status - UK and Local

LBAP Partnership area Status: Local Priority Species

The two Butterfly-orchids are similar in appearance and overlap in size, causing some problems for identification. They are most readily distinguished by characters associated with their anthers and the size of their flower parts. The Greater Butterfly-orchid is found throughout Britain, tending to be more western in Scotland. The Lesser is a much more northern species, with scattered localities in Wales and northern England, but only becoming common in the northwest of Scotland.

Today, in the LBAP Partnership area, the Greater Butterfly-orchid is known from 48 one-km squares, twelve of these being pre-1987 records. By contrast there are only five records for Lesser Butterfly-orchid, all pre-1987 except for one recent site (near Gourock). There is limited specific data on former distribution but earlier Flora writers considered both to be frequent. Hennessy's *Clydesdale Flora* (1891) describes Greater Butterfly-orchid from "moist woods and thickets", but only names Gourock; the Lesser he notes from "moist meadows and heaths" and cites Gourock to Arran. Lee (1933) does not mention any localities but notes the habitats for Greater Butterfly-orchid as "wet meadows, moors and heaths", somewhat at variance with Hennessy's observations. Today all of the records for Greater Butterfly-orchid tend to be from unimproved, or semi-improved, neutral pasture, or occasionally from neglected waste ground grassland, including former railway embankments.

The Greater Butterfly-orchid is a species of damp woodlands on base rich soils in the south of England, but in more northern parts it is a feature of permanent pasture and meadows. It becomes markedly scarcer in upland pastures or on moorlands. These tend to be the favoured habitats of the Lesser Butterfly-orchid, which can tolerate more acidic soils, often quite poorly draining. Population survival depends on the maintenance of traditional habitat management.

Factors Causing Loss or Decline

There is little past data on the species in order to monitor declines or changes in populations but, contrasted with earlier authors' comments, neither species can be described as frequent, certainly in the case of the Lesser Butterfly-orchid. The general decline in unimproved neutral grassland locally, and loss of upland pasture, give further weight to the presumption of decline. Agricultural improvement is the most likely cause of loss, and high stock densities may lead to over-grazing or trampling.



Inverclyde
Renfrewshire
East Renfrewshire
LBAP



Greater Butterfly Orchid © Norman Tait

Butterfly-orchids (*Platanthera chlorantha*) (*Platanthera bifolia*)

Greater Butterfly-orchid

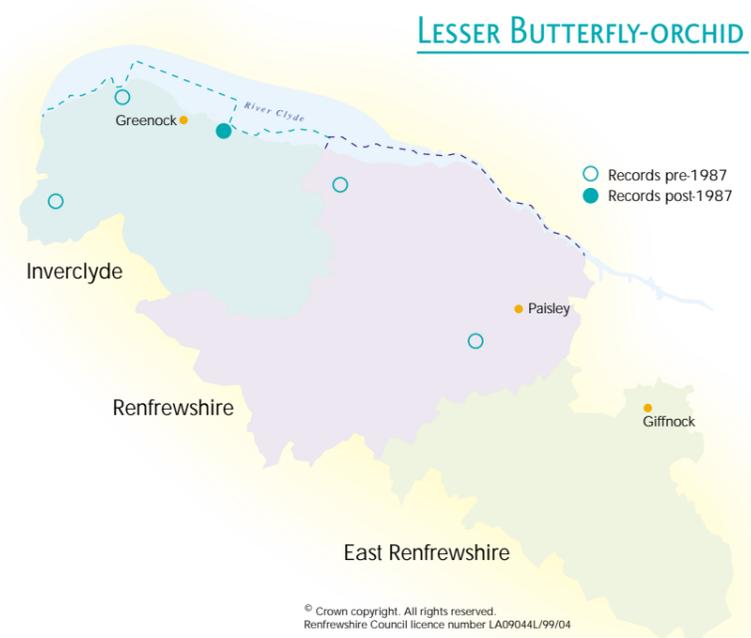
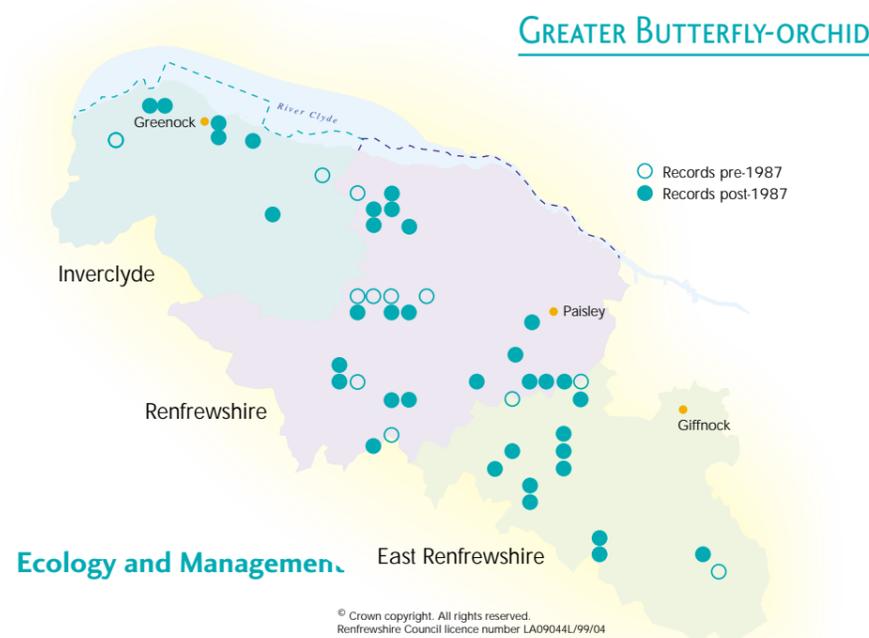
An orchid which smells faintly of vanilla with two glossy leaves folded around the base. Height about 30 cm. The white flowers are more tinged with green than those of the Lesser Butterfly-orchid.



Lesser Butterfly Orchid © Norman Tait

Lesser Butterfly-orchid

A sweet-smelling orchid of about 25 cm high with two basal leaves folding around the stem. The flowers are white with a slight green tinge. It can be distinguished from the Greater Butterfly-orchid by careful examination of its flowering parts.



Ecology and Management

Opportunities and Current Action

The Butterfly-orchids receive no specific action at present, apart from the general protection of wild plants by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. At one site, designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), both species occur. Several of the other sites where the orchids occur (or formerly did) are included within existing or proposed Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs). Other populations occur within the Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park where some monitoring occurs.

Action Plan

A priority is to increase the awareness among landowners and landusers of the species' presence and their vulnerability to agricultural treatments. The maintenance of appropriate habitat management regimes and their introduction elsewhere should help to stabilise populations and prevent further decline.



Greater Butterfly-orchid © Norman Tait



Lesser Butterfly-orchid © Norman Tait

Objectives and Targets

- Objective 1 Establish current distribution and status of Butterfly-orchid populations.
- Objective 2 Maintain the current distribution and population sizes.
- Objective 3 Introduce appropriate habitat management to encourage viable population.
- Objective 4 Consider reintroduction of populations at known former localities.
- Objective 5 Review this plan on an annual basis, beginning in 2005.

We will achieve these objectives by:

Action	Actioned by	Timescale
Reviewing and collating available survey information	BSBI PNHS UoP LAs	2004/2005
Ensuring no further loss in extent and quality of existing populations	LAs	2004/2007
Encouraging appropriate management of known sites	FWAG SNH CMRP GBCP	2004/2007
Inform landowners of presence of orchid population	BSBI FWAG	2004/2005
Identifying suitable sites for potential reintroduction	BSBI CMRP GBCP PNHS UoP	2004/2005
Monitoring and recording actions towards these objectives	LBAP Steering Group LBAP Officer Local Records Centre	Ongoing / annual

Links with Other Action Plans

Dwarf Shrub Heathland, Unimproved Grasslands.

Further Information can be obtained from The Biodiversity Officer 0141 842 5281

