

Southern Damselfly

(*Coenagrion mercuriale*)

The southern damselfly is the smallest of several similar-looking blue damselflies found in Britain and has very specialised habitat requirements. On heathland it is associated with base-rich, slow-flowing streams, seepages and mires. It is also found in chalk stream floodplains and some species-rich fen habitats.

The UKBAP Priority Habitats of particular importance to this species are: lowland heathland; chalk rivers; fens; and purple moor grass rush pastures.

Current status

International status

The southern damselfly is globally rare. It is mainly a Central and West European species with a sub-species in Italy and North Africa. It has vanished or is on the edge of extinction in seven countries situated along the northern boundaries of its distribution (Belgium, The Netherlands, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Romania, Poland, and Austria) and is declining in three others (UK, Germany and Switzerland).

National status

It is believed that up to 25% of the global population of this species occurs in the UK. These populations are therefore particularly in need of conservation. In Britain, the southern damselfly is at the northern limit of its range, being found in only seven counties at present: Devon, Dorset, Hampshire, Pembrokeshire, Glamorgan, Anglesey and Oxfordshire, with the largest populations being in the New Forest in Hampshire, and Prescelli in Pembrokeshire. There has been a 30% decline in the UK distribution since 1961.

This species is listed on the Bonn Convention, Appendix II of the Bern Convention and Annex II of the EC Habitats Directive. It is protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and under Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats & c.) Regulations (1994). It is listed as a Priority Species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. In Great Britain this species is classified as *Rare*

(category 3) on the Red Data List. Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) can be designated on the basis of the presence of southern damselfly.

Status on the network

This species is known to occur near to the soft estate in Hampshire, where it is found in fen and watercourses of the River Itchen cSAC (M27 & M3), and in the New Forest cSAC close to the A31. Hampshire is recognised as a national stronghold for the species. The River Itchen cSAC and New Forest cSAC both include southern damselfly as an interest feature.

Current factors affecting the species

Modification of habitat

New road developments or road improvement schemes may affect local drainage patterns and /or water quality. They may also modify or fragment the habitat in such a way that it becomes unsuitable or less favourable for this species. Adult southern damselflies are weak fliers and the species may have correspondingly poor powers of dispersal. Fragmentation may isolate metapopulations leading to genetic isolation and localised extinctions.

Inappropriate management/deterioration of existing habitat

Lack of management of habitats where this species is found may result in the deterioration of its habitat as a result of scrub encroachment and shading-out.



Current action

All known sites for this species in the UK have recently been surveyed and records are held by the British Dragonfly Society (BDS). Under sponsorship from the UK Southern Damselfly BAP Steering Group (EA, EN, CCW, WT & BDS) the species is currently (2001) the subject of two PhDs at Liverpool University. A major survey of the distribution and status of southern damselfly populations in the River Itchen cSAC is currently underway (2001) and will provide detailed information about the populations close to the M27 and M3.

Objectives

The main aims of the Highways Agency Species Action Plan for the southern damselfly are to ensure that new road developments avoid or adequately mitigate any potential impacts on this species and its habitat, including non-designated sites; and to support initiatives to investigate whether existing roads constitute a significant barrier to the dispersal of this species and/or genetic exchange between populations.

	Objective	Proposed actions
A	To avoid adverse impacts of new road schemes or road improvements on southern damselfly.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
B	To mitigate unavoidable impacts on southern damselfly and its habitat.	1, 4, 5, 6
C	To support the continued monitoring of populations and their habitat, adjacent to and downstream of the network, where this species is known to occur. Support the safeguarding of these populations through appropriate management.	1, 4, 6
D	To raise awareness of HA staff, Managing Agents and consultants regarding the significance of southern damselfly on the soft estate.	1, 2, 3, 7
E	To review the results of the survey initiative on the River Itchen and take into account any implications for new road schemes, road improvements, and management on the M3, M27 and A31 (elsewhere as appropriate).	4, 5, 6

Proposed action

The following table lists the actions required to achieve the objectives set out in this Plan. For some of the actions, potential partners have

been assigned as likely sources of co-operation. Targets are provided to give an indication of the timescale for the proposed action.

	Action	Potential partners	Target
	<i>Policy, guidance and advice</i>		
1	Consider publishing an Advice Note on southern damselfly in the DMRB.	EA	2004
2	Provide information to the area manager of Area 3 about the presence of southern damselfly close to the soft estate in Hampshire and the HA's role in the conservation of this species as defined in this document.	EA	2002
	<i>Surveying and monitoring</i>		
3	Liaise with relevant organisations and/or specialists regarding latest knowledge about status of southern damselfly on or adjacent to the network, and record results on the Environmental Database.	EA	2002
4	Support research initiatives which investigate whether existing roads, e.g. M27, M3 and A31 constitute a significant barrier to the dispersal of this species and genetic exchange between populations.	EA	Ongoing
	<i>Mitigation</i>		
5	For all new schemes and road improvements, that are likely to affect hydrological systems, habitat or dispersal routes, ensure that the requirements of Southern Damselfly are taken into account (network area 3, and elsewhere as appropriate).	EA, LAs	Ongoing
6	Support the monitoring of existing sites adjacent to and downstream of the road network (in particular at the M3, M27 & A31 sites), to ensure appropriate road run-off measures and management regimes are in place. Install improved measures, as required.	EA	2006
	<i>Communication and publicity</i>		
7	Information on southern damselfly should be included in environmental training for HA staff and Managing Agents.	-	From 2002

Links with other plans

This plan should be read in conjunction with the Highways Agency HAPs for water features and heathland.

Lead partner

The lead partner for the southern damselfly in the UKBAP is the Environment Agency.

