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## Helping the Duke... of Burgundy

Some of you might be aware that in my spare time I enjoy taking photographs. A particular interest is in photographing the butterflies of the South Downs. Sussex (East and West) is an amazing area for seeing many of the different species of Butterflies we have in the UK, but they can still be difficult to find as their numbers continue to suffer. I was very excited to read that the South Downs National Trust team were planning to work on a project to help one of my favourite butterflies, the Duke of Burgundy. Here is what they had to say:

**Cowslips for Dukes: A call to action!**



### The backstory:

Many of you will know the area up around Bignor car park, at the top of the downs. It's fabulous for views, downland wildlife and bracing walks. What you might not know, is that the area to the west of the car park is part of the Duncton to Bignor SSSI, one of 2 grassland parcels of land that make up a woodland dominated Site of Special Scientific Interest on the north facing scarp slope. The other grassland parcel- known as the Forehill- is further northeast, just below the summit of Bignor Hill.

This spring those parcels were inspected by local butterfly legend Neil Hulme for potential for the European threatened and UK Red list species Duke of Burgundy (*Hamearis Lucina*) butterfly. There are no records of the butterfly here in recent years, but it has a lot of the ingredients for a successful introduction project of the species.

A fussy character, this butterfly likes northwest facing chalk or limestone slopes, with a bit of scattered scrub to protect them from the elements, and cowslips (*Primula veris*) and primroses (*P. vulgaris*) for the females to lay their eggs on. The plants need to be just right: in shade so the eggs don't desiccate in the wind and sun, and the leaves luscious and pointing up just at the right angle. Fortunately, the 2 grassland areas of the SSSI have the beginnings of a Dukes perfect idea of home, including a modest showing of cowslips.

We know that wildlife does better in bigger areas of favourable habitat and needs to be joined or in close enough proximity to swap DNA occasionally and to cope with natural population boom and



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bust years. There are existing fragile populations of Dukes near Kithurst hill to the east and to the west near Duncton hill- we would like to bridge this gaping gap on and around Bignor Hill.

### How can you help?

You can play a vital role in this rewarding project. A technique used successfully in nearby Steyning, was to boost numbers of the larval foodplants: cowslips and primroses by asking folk with green fingers to grow them from seed in plug trays. We wondered whether, you, as local people with horticultural leanings, would be interested in helping?

I got in contact and asked if the team would be interested in working with a local school. This seemed to me a great opportunity for our children and families to be part of some real citizen science. Given the location, it seems the perfect opportunity to study our impact over time and for the children to be actively involved in helping to support a species that is on our doorstep.

Katie Archer, lead ranger, came and talked to the children all about this yesterday. There was a lot of excitement, especially when some children realised just how close they live to the project. Kestrel Class is taking the lead on this project and have today been busy putting some Cowslip seeds provided by the trust into paper bags for all of our families to take home. Katie has kindly provided growing instructions, which will come attached to the bags. We appreciate that not everyone will be able to help, but if you can it would be great to see if we can manage to grow some Cowslips that we can then help the National Trust rangers plant in the newly created environment - making a tangible, positive difference to our local environment.



Thank you for your continued support.

Thomas Moore,  
Headteacher