Hillbrow Grassland

Hillbrow Grassland lies over chalk, creating well drained slightly alkaline soil. This makes it an ideal location for the restoration of nationally rare chalk grassland. Based on traditional hay meadow management, cutting and removing hay in late summer reduces soil nutrients and provides good conditions for a wide mix of wild grasses and flowers.

Together with surrounding pockets of scrub, hedges and trees, the grassland provides food, breeding sites, and shelter for pollinators, birds and reptiles. You will see the flowers change throughout the year, providing colour from early spring until late autumn.

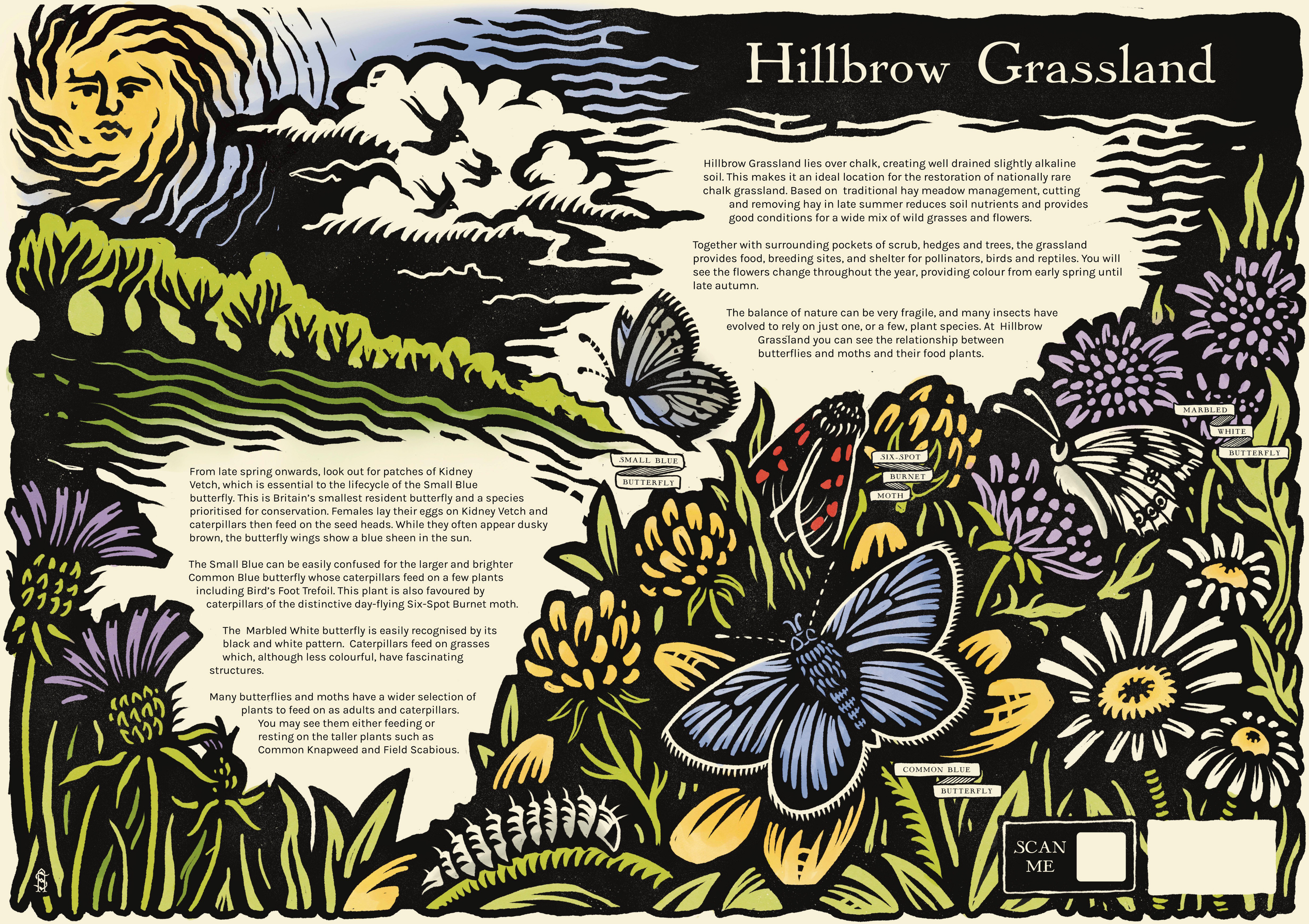
The balance of nature can be very fragile, and many insects have evolved to rely on just one, or a few, plant species. At Hillbrow Grassland you can see the relationship between butterflies and moths and their food plants.

From late spring onwards, look out for patches of Kidney Vetch, which is essential to the lifecycle of the Small Blue butterfly. This is Britain's smallest resident butterfly and a species prioritised for conservation. Females lay their eggs on Kidney Vetch and caterpillars then feed on the seed heads. While they often appear dusky brown, the butterfly wings show a blue sheen in the sun.

The Small Blue can be easily confused for the larger and brighter Common Blue butterfly whose caterpillars feed on a few plants including Bird's Foot Trefoil. This plant is also favoured by caterpillars of the distinctive day-flying Six-Spot Burnet moth.

The Marbled White butterfly is easily recognised by its black and white pattern. Caterpillars feed on grasses which, although less colourful, have fascinating structures.

Many butterflies and moths have a wider selection of plants to feed on as adults and caterpillars. You may see them either feeding or resting on the taller plants such as Common Knapweed and Field Scabious.



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