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Hairstreaks highlighted on Hedleyhope Fell

Despite national declines in key species of butterfly, a success story survives and thrives at Durham Wildlife Trust's Hedleyhope Fell Nature Reserve near Tow Law.

The *Green hairstreak* butterfly is a *Durham Biodiversity Action Plan* species due to its restricted distribution and it appears to have established a resident population on the Reserve.

The Fell is one of the largest remaining examples of mid-altitude heathland in County Durham and is a rare habitat. The landscape has suffered great disturbance in the past from opencast mining activities but it is now valued for informal recreation, as well as its wildlife.

Craig Best, Hedleyhope Fell Wildlife & Community Officer said, "Hedleyhope Fell is a fantastic site for a wide range of species and I am delighted to discover that the Fell is the best known site in County Durham for the *Green hairstreak* butterfly.

"It is probably the best site I have seen in the north for *bilberry*, which is the food plant of the butterfly's larvae. Coupled with scattered trees and scrub, the Fell offers perfect conditions for this species'.

Hedleyhope Fell has long been recognised as an excellent site for a variety of butterflies. Over the years Conservation Rangers have annually contributed to national butterfly distribution surveys, which has proved invaluable in denoting distribution of 'key' species, such as the *Green hairstreak*.

Durham Wildlife Trust's management of the Nature Reserve has enabled previously sparsely recorded species to develop stable populations.

Craig continued, "I will be working with the Hedleyhope Fell Volunteer Task Force to improve and expand the habitat for this species over the next few years. We'll also be working closely with Butterfly Conservation to ensure that this and other species continue to thrive on the Reserve."

The 2005 surveys also identified the mysterious, nocturnal bird, the *nightjar*. Although it is too early to suggest a resident breeding population, site conditions are favourable to support this restricted species. Other notable species include the *slow worm* and *common lizard*.

For more information about Hedleyhope Fell, including how to volunteer, please contact Craig on 01388 488728 or cbest@durhamwt.co.uk.