Plant Communities in Oak Savannahs in Ontario: Are We Ready for Reintroduction of the Karner Blue Butterfly (*Lycaeides melissa samuelis*)?

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ABSTRACT

The endangered Karner Blue Butterfly (KBB) (*Lycaeides melissa samuelis* Nabokov) is an indicator taxon for the globally rare oak savannah habitat. Since the extirpation of the KBB from Ontario, which is the only province in Canada where the butterfly was originally found, a Recovery Team was established in 1991 and restoration work has been done, trying to improve the quality of various potential KBB reintroduction sites in Ontario as preparation for reintroduction of the butterfly from the U.S.A. Though promising results have been observed, no systematic scheme has been employed to evaluate the quality of these restored oak savannah sites to see if they are ready for KBB reintroduction. This study evaluated five potential KBB reintroduction sites in Ontario by looking at both biotic (vegetation, especially the larval host plant wild lupine (*Lupinus perennis*), 1st and 2nd brood adult nectar source plants, and tending ant species) and abiotic (temperature, relative humidity and light intensity) aspects. Field data were collected in the summers of 2002 and 2003 from these five sites and in 2003 from three potential founder KBB sites in the U.S.A. The Ontario and U.S. sites were then compared in terms of the ecological requirements of the KBB. The results show that all five potential reintroduction sites in Ontario are of lower quality, at least in certain aspects, compared to the three potential founder butterfly sites in the U.S.A. This implies that success is not guaranteed if the KBB is reintroduced to these sites in Ontario under current habitat conditions. Comparisons of the Ontario and the U.S. sites also reveal that Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore (IDNL) is the most similar to four of the five Ontario sites in terms of biological community and microhabitat structure. IDNL is therefore identified as the priority source butterfly site for KBB reintroduction in Ontario. Meanwhile, restoration and management of the potential KBB reintroduction sites in Ontario should continue and request for permission from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to take butterflies from IDNL for experimentation in captive rearing techniques in the Metropolitan Toronto Zoo is strongly recommended.

KEYWORDS

Restoration; reintroduction; oak savannah; Karner Blue; *Lycaeidea melissa samuelis*.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: General Introduction

CHAPTER 2: Study Site Description

CHAPTER 3: Are We Ready to Reintroduce the Karner Blue Butterfly?

CHAPTER 4: Identification of the Most Suitable Founder Butterfly Sites

CHAPTER 5: Restoration and Management Recommendations

LIST OF MAPS, TABES AND FIGURES

LIST OF MAPS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1: General Introduction

Restoration Ecology

Restoration of natural habitats has a very long history. Clearing a piece of land by "slash and burn", using it for agriculture for several years, and then leaving it and burning another one can be viewed as a practice of restoration, with the restoration strategy being leaving the land alone and letting nature take care of itself. This type of restoration is only a by-product of agriculture. Restoration effort intentionally carried out by humans to restore disturbed natural communities was not documented until the 1900s (Jordan 1988).

Difference between Ecological Restoration and Restoration Ecology

Despite the long history of habitat restoration, the terms "ecological restoration" and "restoration ecology" are very often mixed up. The differences between these two terms are best explained by Clewell (1993). He explained that restoration ecology as to ecological restoration was analogous to medical researchers as to physicians. Restoration ecologists, similar to medical researchers, provide the most up-to-date information and technology to ecological restorationists, who act as physicians and try to "cure" the "diseased" environment. In turn, ecological restorationists share their first-hand experience and discoveries with restoration ecologists, just as physicians do with medical researchers. Clewell (1993) described this close relationship between ecological restoration and restoration ecology as two sides of the same coin. Though this sounds perfectly logical, this "modern" view was nothing close to the concepts of ecological restoration in the early 20th century.

First Systematic Attempt of Ecological Restoration

Although local-scale environmental "improvement" work has been documented since the 1900s (Jordan 1988), large-scale systematic ecological restoration was not attempted until the early 1930s when Aldo Leopold and his colleagues at the University of Wisconsin proposed to restore a collection of communities native to Wisconsin and the Upper Midwest for biological research purposes. They did so because a large proportion of the native communities in Wisconsin had already been disturbed or altered, and only remnant fragments of natural communities were left scattered across the area (Jordan 1991). This proposal led to the establishment of the Madison Arboretum in the University of Wisconsin in 1934 (Berger 1990; Jordan 1988), which was comprised of around 120 hectares (300 acres) of derelict farmland where more than 30 distinct native communities were to be restored (Jordan 1991).

This first ecological restoration attempt was clearly product-oriented (Jordan 1988), scientific and educational (Jordan 1991) as the objective was to "gather" all native communities in one place for future biological research. One could also say that the objective was environmental since the restoration work tried to prevent the "extinction", or at least "extirpation", of native communities. However, this was not really the case because if protecting natural communities had been one of the objectives, effort would have been put to conserve the remnants of the communities instead of recreating them on abandoned farmland.

Results and Consequences of the Madison Arboretum

The result of the establishment of the Madison Arboretum was a failure because the communities being restored were still distinctly different from the undisturbed habitat remnants after 50 years of work (Jordan 1991). Despite this, soon after the restoration had started, scientists saw a lot of research opportunities in this project (Jordan 1988). Many new ideas and knowledge were generated from the ecological restoration process (Jordan 1991). One of the classic examples was the discovery of the critical role of fire in maintenance of tall-grass prairie (Jordan 1988, 1991).

In the 1940s, restorationists John Curtis and Ted Sperry tried to restore a tall-grass prairie in the Madison Arboretum. They cleared a piece of land and planted it with prairie species. It did not take long before they found that non-prairie species kept invading the land and there was no way the land would become a true tall-grass prairie unless something was done. They later realized that fire was the only element missing and therefore started performing prescribed burns. The non-prairie species were largely eliminated as a result (Jordan 1988, 1991). The role of fire as a non-prairie species suppresser in tall-grass prairies was hence discovered and verified.

Even though it was obvious that restoration work generated knowledge in the field of ecology, scientists were not very conscious about this heuristic value of ecological restoration from the 1940s to 1960s. They generally viewed the generated knowledge as a by-product of the trial-and-error process in their restoration work (Jordan 1988). They knew their experience could tell them what would work and what would not work, but they overlooked the fact that it might also suggest why and how one approach worked but not others (Jordan 1988).

Change of View since the 1970s

The heuristic value of ecological restoration had been overlooked until the 1970s. Firstly, there was a need to explain to the public the significance of the Madison Arboretum since it had low value as a teaching and research centre for native communities because the restored communities differed from natural undisturbed ones (Jordan 1991). This forced the scientists to come up with alternative explanations and start rethinking the educational value of this project. That was when they started to realize the heuristic value of the process of ecological restoration. Secondly, the green movement also started in the 1970s. In 1977, the Surface Mine and Reclamation Act was passed in the U.S.A. (Jackson *et al* 1995; Jordan 1988). These incidents attracted public attention and people started to realize that we had already caused too much environmental damage. Conservation, as well as restoration, of natural habitats, was necessary. In fact, in some situations, restoration was compulsory under the Surface Mine and Reclamation Act (Jackson *et al* 1995).

In the 1970s and early 1980s, restoration was still product-oriented as the primary goal was to reverse the damage that had been done. However, this product-oriented view was quite different from the original view of those who started the Madison Arboretum in 1934 (Jordan 1991). The motive for ecological restoration had changed. Ecological restoration was no longer done just to gather a collection of natural communities for educational purpose and scientific research, but to restore rare or lost habitats and communities as a conservation measure.

Criticisms of Ecological Restoration

As more people realized how much damage humans had done to the environment, more and more people joined the field of ecological restoration. These people include biologists, chemists, environmentalists, social scientists and politicians. The diverse background of this group led to two major disagreements. The first was upon a common definition for the term “ecological restoration,” and the second was that some non-scientists started to question and criticize the usefulness of ecological restoration as a conservation strategy.

The first criticism to the practice of restoration was that it offered a license to kill (Berger 1990; Cairns 1988). Once restoration was widely accepted and shown to have successfully repaired damaged habitats, people might no longer support conservation of pristine natural communities. They would damage the environment without hesitation, thinking that restoration would be “the” solution. The rate of environmental destruction would then be so much greater than that of ecological restoration, making our environment even worse.

Many restorationists opposed this criticism as they emphasized that conservation was always the top priority (Jordan 1991). They knew the limitations of ecological restoration. When an ecosystem was disturbed, in many cases, there was no way to return it to its original state (Cairns 1988; Jackson *et al* 1995). Therefore, restoration could not replace, but only compliment conservation (Berger 1990; Nilsen 1991). In fact, this compliment was necessary since too much damage had already been done and simply conserving what was left undisturbed was far from enough.

The second criticism was an argument that stated that ecological restoration was not a science (Turner 1987). It was a mere application of knowledge and technology to accomplish a task, and therefore had no scientific value (Bradshaw 1993; Jordan 1988). Opposition to this criticism was expressed by many scientists who thought of the heuristic value of ecological restoration (Bradshaw 1993; Jordan *et al* 1987). They explained their views in the symposium on restoration ecology in 1984.

Symposium on Restoration Ecology in 1984

In October 1984, a symposium on restoration ecology was held as one of the many events that celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Madison Arboretum (Jordan 1988). In this symposium, many scientists expressed their views on the heuristic value of ecological restoration, which they thought was undoubtedly a branch of science. Anthony Bradshaw stated that restoration could be considered as an "acid test" for ecological hypotheses that were based on observation (Jordan 1988). John Harper's idea was similar. He pointed out that agriculture was a new paradigm for ecology (Jordan 1988). Ecologists should work as farmers who manipulated and experimented in their field instead of generating new ideas based only on field observation. The best experimental approach would be to find an undisturbed system, describe it, disturb it and then restore it, and observe the response of the system at all stages (Jordan 1988). However, since there were already too many disturbed systems, it would be too environmental-unfriendly to disturb another piece of untouched land. Restoring disturbed systems was therefore the most practical approach. William R. Jordan III took it even further. Not only did he point out that ecological restoration was perhaps the best way of learning about the systems being restored, he also argued that we should not just focus on restoring the natural communities, but our historical harmonious relationship with them (Jordan 1991). This idea was perfectly illustrated by the example of fire management of tall-grass prairie.

To restore a tall-grass prairie, we have to use prescribed burns because prairie species were pre-adapted to occasional fire that was sometimes anthropogenic. If we had aimed at restoring a "natural" community with no human disturbance, a tall-grass prairie would have never been successfully restored. In contrast, when prescribed burns were employed to mimic anthropogenic fire disturbances in the past, a harmony could be reached between human disturbance and the fire-tolerant prairie species, and hence the tall-grass prairie community could successfully be restored.

Post-1984 View of Ecological Restoration

The ideas of Bradshaw, Harper and Jordan presented in the symposium on restoration ecology in 1984 all agreed upon the heuristic value of ecological restoration. The approach of using ecological restoration as a research tool for ecology was referred to as "restoration ecology" (Jordan 1991.) This confirmed that ecological restoration was indeed a form of knowledge-generating science instead of a mere application of knowledge and technology. It also changed people's view towards ecological restoration from a product-oriented to a product- and process-oriented one because the restoration process generates information and knowledge that flow in a loop from ecologists to restorationists and vice versa. Ecological restoration was not only environmental, but also scientific and educational. It became a ground for ecological hypothesis testing and was aimed at restoring a harmonious relationship between human and the environment.

The concepts of ecological restoration and restoration ecology have not changed much since the symposium on restoration ecology in 1984. Despite an agreement on the heuristic value of ecological restoration, there was still not a common definition for the term "ecological restoration." This problem was solved in 1994 by the Society for Ecological Restoration, which was established in 1988. After spending one year consulting and gathering opinion from its members, the Society for Ecological Restoration came up with a single-line definition for "ecological restoration", which was "the process of repairing damages caused by humans to the diversity and dynamics of indigenous ecosystems" (Jackson *et al* 1995). Under this definition, restoration aimed at reversing changes due to human disturbances only if they have caused damage to the diversity and dynamics of ecosystems. Historical anthropogenic disturbances to which ecosystems were pre-adapted should not be removed or compensated for in ecological restoration. Clearly, Jordan's idea of restoring a harmonious relationship between human and the environment was embedded in this definition.

Despite the change of view since 1984, there are still many small-scale restoration projects that are product- but not process-oriented (Heckman and Cairns 1988). In many such cases, restorationists use the knowledge provided by ecologists to restore their target communities without sharing their experience and findings with them. In the future, restorationists should be encouraged to give feedback to ecologists about their restoration work (Jordan 1991). This can ensure the flow of information between ecologists and restorationists to form a complete loop and accelerate the development of restoration techniques and ecological knowledge.

Summary

The practice of restoration has not really changed much since the 1930s, but the way people view it has changed substantially over time. Ecological restoration started as a process of gathering natural communities for biological research in 1934 in the University of Wisconsin, which was product-oriented with scientific and educational motives. Because of the green movement in the 1970s and 1980s and the passage of the Surface Mine and Reclamation Act in the U.S.A. in 1977, ecological restoration evolved into an applied environmental technology which was solely environmental, and not until the symposium on restoration ecology in 1984 did ecological restoration turn into a practice that was product- and process-oriented, with both environmental and educational motives. Unfortunately, despite the change of view, many restorationists who work on local small-scale restoration projects still overlook the importance of the heuristic value of their restoration work. Hence, encouragement of feedback from restorationists to ecologists is still in need.

Species Reintroduction

Species Reintroduction as an indicator of Restoration Success

Ecological restoration is currently a common practice in many parts of the world (Bruckner and Bruckner 2001; Cohn 2001; Schultz 2001; Lee *et al* 2002; Martin and Chambers 2002; Rogers *et al* 2002; Robinson and Uehlinger 2003; Taft and Haig 2003; Wilkie and Mathew 2003). Significant improvement in habitat quality, such as increase in species richness or density of rare native species, is often seen as a result of restoration projects (O'Dwyer and Attiwill 2000; Atkinson 2002; Fletcher and Koford 2002, 2003; Sprenger *et al* 2002; Tanner *et al* 2002; Heuberger and Putz 2003; Snell and Cristol 2003). Though detection, or even quantification, of improvement in habitat quality is usually relatively easy (Hulme *et al* 2002; Roman *et al* 2002), it is often difficult to define if a restoration project is truly successful or if the integrity and functioning of the ecosystem are completely restored, especially when little is known about what the habitat was like historically. At sites where historical information is available, success of an ecological restoration project can sometimes be defined as the successful establishment of a persisting population of previously extirpated species which is/are indicator species associated with that habitat type (Majer and Nichols 1998; Schram *et al* 1999).

To use this method, species reintroduction from elsewhere is often required. If the selected indicator species is one with good dispersal ability and is found in neighbouring areas, reintroduction may not be necessary as the species may colonize the restored habitat by itself when the environment of the restored site becomes once again suitable (Carbone *et al* 1998; Desrochers *et al* 1998; Kiviat *et al* 2000; Tajovsky 2001; Shea *et al*

2002; Watts and Gibbs 2002; Nakamura *et al* 2003; Nichols and Nichols 2003; Tucker *et al* 2003). Similarly, if the selected indicator species is a plant with long-lived seeds and the seed bank in the restored site is not totally depleted, reintroduction is also not needed because the seeds will geminate if the quality of the habitat is improved and environmental conditions become more favourable (Lewis 1988; Galatowitsch and van der Valk 1996; de Bruijn and Hofstra 1997; Brouwer and Roelofs 2001; Grootjans *et al* 2001). Unfortunately, such is not always the case. Therefore, if establishment of a healthy population of a previously extirpated species is used as an indicator of successful habitat restoration, reintroduction of such species by humans is sometimes required (Brown and Bedford 1997; Lundholm and Simser 1999; Nienhuis *et al* 2002). This is true when the indicator species is an animal species with poor dispersal ability or extirpated from the local region.

The Reintroduction Specialist Group

The Reintroduction Specialist Group (RSG) was established as a Specialist Group of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)/Species Survival Commision (SSC) in 1988 due to increasing numbers of translocations and reintroductions worldwide (Sarrazin 1996; Stanley Price and Soorae 2003). Its mission is "to promote the reestablishment or reinforcement of self-sustaining populations of plants and animals in the wild" (Stanley Price and Soorae 2003). Reintroduction was defined by the IUCN/SSC RSG as "an attempt to establish a species in an area which was once part of its historical range, but from which it has been extirpated or become extinct" (IUCN

1998). The IUCN/SSC RSG had also drafted the IUCN guidelines for reintroduction since 1992, which became official IUCN policy in 1995 (IUCN 1998; Stanley and Soorae 2003). These are intended to act as a guide for procedures useful to reintroduction programs and to help ensure that the reintroductions achieve their intended conservation benefit, and do not cause adverse side-effects of greater impact (IUCN 1998).

Trends in Species Reintroduction

Reintroduction has become more common in recent years. This is evident from the study by Beck *et al* (1994) and the RSG's Reintroduction Practitioners Directory (Soorae and Seddon 1998). Beck *et al* (1994) compiled a list of all known reintroductions from 1900 to 1992 while the Reintroduction Practitioners Directory contains a list of all reintroduction projects known to the RSG, including those that were ongoing in 1998

KBB being too low and the light conditions under which wild lupine plants grow being not heterogeneous enough. Both problems are probably the results of a dense canopy. Evidence that supports this notion includes low integrated light intensity (Graph 4.2), high canopy cover (Graph 4.1) and the presence of typical forest species such as Starflower (*Trientalis borealis* Rafinesque) which is absent in all other sites. To improve habitat quality, opening up the canopy is therefore essential.

Prescribed burning is a good way of reducing canopy cover. However, in the case of the MT, physical means such as selective cutting and brush hogging may be more effective under current conditions. This is because the canopy is largely composed of mature trees and tree saplings which could probably withstand a low intensity burn. Selective cutting or brush hogging followed by a burn will probably yield the best result. Using these methods to create dispersal corridors among the wild lupine populations in different areas is also recommended as these plots are quite far from one another. Wild lupine can be planted along these corridors to further encourage dispersal of the KBB among these areas when the KBB is reintroduced to the MT.

Seeding of wild lupine and nectar source plants may be considered after reduction of canopy cover. However, this may not be necessary if these species respond positively to the change in canopy cover and light conditions, which they probably will.

4. Pinery Provincial Park

Although density of wild lupine in PPP is the second highest among the Ontario sites, it is still much lower than those of the three potential founder KBB sites in the

U.S.A. In addition, the area of wild lupine coverage is too small and needs to be enlarged. To accomplish these, seeding or planting with wild lupine is recommended.

At the area of PPP RA, wild lupine density is very high close to the edge of the paved road where canopy cover is absent and a lot of sunlight is available. However, in the interior parts, where trees are present and the shrub layer is dominated by Fragrant Sumac (*Rhus aromatica* Aiton), wild lupine cannot survive the heavy shade. Therefore, to increase the area of wild lupine coverage, the open space beside the paved road should be expanded by selective cutting and mowing in the adjacent area. Seeding may then follow to accelerate the process of wild lupine establishment in the newly cleared area. Fire is also an alternative that could be used to open up the canopy.

For the area of PPP SH, the wild lupine population is very small (approx. 30 plants) and is concentrated on the southern edge of the bowl-shaped habitat where the circular, almost treeless central depression meets the tree line surrounding it. The distribution of wild lupine in this area suggests that the central part of the bowl may be too hot and dry. Hence, wild lupine plantation should be focused along the edge of the bowl where at least some shade is available. To expand the wild lupine population towards the centre of the bowl, seeding can be tried at the centre where a few chokecherry saplings are present to provide some shade. Alternatively, wild lupine plant plugs can be situated at the centre of the bowl and tended carefully by, for example, watering.

Connecting PPP RA and PPP SH by dispersal corridors through clear cutting and wild lupine plantation along the path is also recommended, but expansion of the wild lupine populations in these two areas should be the main focus at present time.

Wild lupine density in PPP EX is high, but at the southeastern edge of the exclosure, the density is relatively low due to overcast by tree seedlings, especially Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum* (Nutt.) Nees). Removal of at least some of these seedlings, either by selective cutting or prescribed burning, will improve the situation and allow the density of wild lupine to increase, and is therefore recommended. In areas just outside the deer exclosure, only a few wild lupine plants were observed even though many have been planted right next to the exclosure. This suggests that deer herbivory, at least for a certain period of time in the past, was once a problem. Since the deer population has been under control for the past decade, plantation of wild lupine should be tried again just outside the deer exclosure. This will help not just to expand the area of wild lupine coverage but also to test whether the current deer population level is still high enough to affect wild lupine establishment.

Not enough second brood KBB nectar source plants is also one of the concerns in the study areas of PPP. This problem can be solved by seeding/planting these areas with 2nd brood KBB nectar source plants such as New Jersey Tea (*Ceanothus americanus* L.) and Butterfly Weed (*Asclepias tuberose* L.), both of which are found in other parts of the park. Seeds of these species can be collected from the park for plantation in these three study areas.

5. The Karner Blue Sanctuary

Like other Ontario sites, relatively low density of wild lupine compared to the three potential founder butterfly sites in the U.S.A. is one of the concerns in the KBS. To increase the density of wild lupine, burning the site is one of the best methods. This was actually done in spring 2004. All three study areas in the KBS were burnt in this prescribed fire. Wild lupine density will probably increase as a result of the burn because fire often initiates germination of wild lupine seeds which have hard seed coats that make them hard to germinate otherwise. Another part of the KBS was burnt in spring 2003 and an increase in wild lupine coverage was observed after the burn (Chan, personal observation). Meanwhile, instead of seeding/planting the area with wild lupine to increase wild lupine density, monitoring of the wild lupine populations in the burnt areas is recommended to see if fire actually stimulated growth. Since wild lupine is already there, planting should be an option if the burn does not sufficiently increase their density.

Other than monitoring the wild lupine populations, planting should be done along the trails that connect the different populations. Expansion of areas of wild lupine coverage is preferable but not necessary at this point as the response of wild lupine coverage after the prescribed fire is yet to be seen. In contrast, increasing the connectivity among the study areas is beneficial and should be done immediately.

Low heterogeneity in light conditions under which wild lupine grows is another concern in the KBS. The situation here is similar to that of the MT, with low mean and standard deviation in integrated light intensity (Graph 4.2), indicating that wild lupine plants are not doing well under full sun as they should be. This is particularly true in the area of KBS BO where wild lupine is found in high density under semi-shade conditions at the edge of the central opening, and in much lower density in the completely open area centrally as at PPP SH. The burn in spring 2004 should have at least improved the light conditions by removing some of the canopy cover. To further improve the current situation, wild lupine establishment should be encouraged at the centre of the bowl where quite a large wild lupine population existed before the drought in the late 1980s. This should use the method suggested for PPP SH. However, this may not be necessary if the site responds well after the prescribed burn in spring 2004.

Other Recommendations

As mentioned in Chapter 1, due to global climate change, reintroduction of the KBB to Ontario is urgently required to secure its long-term persistence. Before the Ontario sites are ready and actual reintroduction of the KBB takes place in Ontario, I suggest that the KBB Recovery Team should request permission from the USFWS to take a few KBB from IDNL, which is the identified best founder butterfly site for KBB reintroduction in Ontario (Chapter 3), and rear the butterflies in captivity in the Metropolitan Toronto Zoo where experimentation with captive rearing methods have been tested with the Eastern Tailed Blue. The butterflies reared in captivity can be released back to IDNL or transferred to other sites in the U.S.A. for reintroduction purposes, such as the Ivanhoe Nature Preserve in West Gary, Indiana where butterflies have been reintroduced from IDNL since 2001, while the Ontario sites are being restored and prepared for KBB reintroduction. This will provide an opportunity for the Metropolitan Toronto Zoo to test the methods developed from using the Eastern Tailed Blue and accumulate first-hand experience in captive rearing of KBB in Ontario. Once the oak savannah sites in Ontario are ready for reintroduction, not only will we have total confidence in our rearing capabilities, there will also be more KBB available for immediate reintroduction from the Metropolitan Toronto Zoo. Therefore, instead of waiting till the oak savannah sites in Ontario are ready for KBB reintroduction, I strongly encourage the KBB Recovery Team to immediately apply for permission from the USFWS to take a few KBB from IDNL for captive breeding in the Metropolitan Toronto Zoo.

Concluding Remarks

Although the restored oak savannah sites in Ontario are of lower quality compared to the three potential founder butterfly sites in the U.S.A., the quality of these sites has improved due to restoration work and will probably continue to improve with further restoration efforts. Restoration and management should therefore continue at all potential KBB reintroduction sites in Ontario, following the adaptive management approach and the recommendations suggested in this chapter. Hopefully, the quality of the sites in Ontario will further improve and reintroduction of the KBB will soon take place in Ontario, bringing this endangered butterfly back to the oak savannahs in Ontario where it once thrived.

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