



## GROUPS

Examples from left to right: Gatekeeper (*Pyronia tithonus*) Regina Ebner, Comma (*Polygonia c-album*) Regina Ebner, Painted lady (*Vanessa cardui*) Regina Ebner, Peacock (*Aglais io*) Norman Crowson

# Butterflies

Information: Regina Ebner

### All about butterflies

- There are about 18,500 named butterfly species worldwide, with more thought to be awaiting discovery. The UK has 59 species of butterflies – 57 resident species and two regular migrants – the painted lady and clouded yellow. Up to 22 of those species can be recorded in gardens.
- All butterflies play an important role in pollination.
- Butterflies have four different life stages. During their short lifetime, they undergo a complete change, or metamorphosis. Each one begins life as an egg, hatches into a caterpillar, pupates into a chrysalis and then emerges as an adult.
- Most British butterflies overwinter as either eggs (white letter hairstreak, silver washed fritillary), some as caterpillars (small copper, meadow brown), some as pupae (orange tip, holly blue) and some as adults (brimstone and small tortoiseshell). Some species, like the painted lady, cannot withstand our winters and migrate northwards from their breeding areas each spring. The speckled wood can overwinter as either a caterpillar or a chrysalis.
- Butterflies are cold-blooded and will not fly if the temperature is below 10 degrees Celcius.
- Adult butterflies use colour to attract mates and avoid predation, but also to raise their body temperature by basking. This is particularly important in British butterflies.

### Why do butterflies need our help?

In the past 40 years there has been a 76% decline in the abundance of UK butterflies and many common species are now struggling for survival. Loss of pollinating plants, agricultural changes, overgrazing by deer in woodlands and climate change are all factors in the decline. Recent intensive conservation work with the farming community has proven the trends can be reversed. Duke of Burgundy fritillary is one such success story and is being actively cared for at one Partners in Action!

**DID YOU KNOW? Many butterflies can taste with their feet! They find out whether the leaf they sit on would be good food for their caterpillars or not, if so, they will lay eggs on it!**

**The brimstone butterfly (*Gonepteryx rhamni*) has the longest adult lifetime: 9–10 months.**

### How can we help?

- Avoid using pesticides and insecticides.
- Avoid using peat. The best place for peat to be is in the ground on our moors and heathlands. So one way to protect our upland insect populations is to boycott the sale of peat for gardening.
- Help restore natural habitats and create safe havens for butterflies.
- Let your garden grow wild. Butterflies need longer grasses for warmth and shelter, so if you can, leave the edge of your lawn and wildflowers to grow, for butterflies to lay larvae on.
- Provide a food source – grow nectar-rich plants for adult butterflies and food for caterpillars. Many of the plants needed are easy to grow and tolerant to the changing climate. It is worth thinking about early/late flowering species so that a source of nectar can be found most months of the year. These can include species of hellebores, winter ivy, early crocuses, aconites, early clematis and mahonia.

#### Plants for adults (nectar):

- Spring nectar: aubretia, bluebell, clover, cuckooflower, daisy, dandelion, forget-me-not, honesty, pansy, primrose, sweet rocket and wallflower.
- Late summer/autumn: buddleia, french marigold, ice plant, ivy, knapweed, lavender, marjoram, michaelmas daisy, mint, red valerian, scabious and thyme.

#### Plants for caterpillars:

- Stinging nettles: comma, red admiral.  
Holly and ivy: holly blue.  
Buckthorn & alder buckthorn: brimstone.  
Cuckooflower and garlic mustard: orange-tip & green-veined white.  
Hop: comma.  
Common bird's-foot trefoil: common blue.

### Learn more

- [butterfly-conservation.org/butterflies/](https://butterfly-conservation.org/butterflies/)
- butterfly house: [woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2019/07/diy-butterfly-house/](https://woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2019/07/diy-butterfly-house/)
- Contact an A Rocha UK naturalist at [naturalist@arocha.org](mailto:naturalist@arocha.org)