



BUTTERFLY WATCH

How many butterflies are there in Britain?

Nearly 70 kinds of butterflies, but over 2500 kinds of moths!



British butterflies can be classified in 5 major groups:

Whites and Yellows: such as the Large White and Brimstone

Nymphalid: Large, brightly coloured and patterned butterflies such as the peacock and red admiral

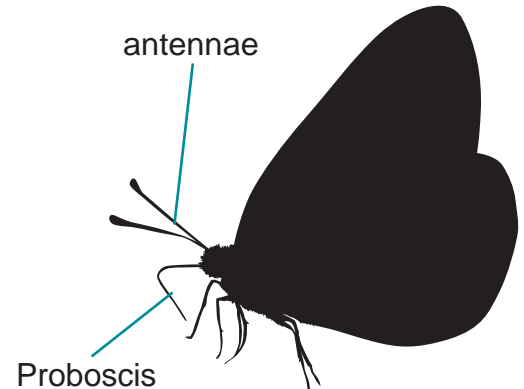
Browns: Usually brown with eye-spots, such as the meadow brown and gatekeeper

Blues, Coppers and Hairstreaks: Shiny, metallic butterflies such as the holly blue and small copper

Skippers: Moth-like butterflies, usually orange-brown such as the small skipper

Butterfly or moth?

It's not completely straight forward to distinguish butterflies and moths. Generally speaking, British butterflies have clubbed antennae and moths have feathered antennae. All British butterflies are day flying, but be warned that many moth species fly in the day too - though most do only fly at night. It is also true that butterflies often rest with their wings close above their backs, but this can also be variable between the species.



Feeding

Butterflies and moths feed on nectar, the sweet liquid found inside most flowers. As soon as they land on a flower they unroll their proboscis (long tongue) and feed from deep inside a flower. Butterflies particularly like flowers with a bright colour and strong smell. Moths that feed at dusk and night like night-scented, and pale coloured flowers that can be seen in the dark.

Caterpillars have jaws and teeth that eat leaves - usually a particular plant species for each species of caterpillar.

The butterfly lifecycle



In spring the butterfly lays her eggs on the food plant of her larvae (caterpillar) - often on the underside of the leaf. When the caterpillar emerges, it's sole purpose is to feed, building up its body weight over a few weeks until it is ready to 'pupate' - the stage in which the caterpillar turns to a butterfly. Sometimes this is on the plant, sometimes in the soil. In the chrysalis (hardened case) the caterpillar fat is broken down and rebuilds to the body of a butterfly. Once the adult butterfly is ready to emerge the pupae splits and the new butterfly crawls out. It's crumpled wings are spread out to dry and harden in preparation for flight.