



Oxford
Island



BUTTERFLIES AT OXFORD ISLAND

Lough Neagh Discovery Centre,
Oxford Island National Nature Reserve,
Annaloiste Road, Craigavon, Co. Armagh BT66 6NJ
☎ 028 3832 2205 | 📱 / Oxford Island Nature Reserve



**Armagh City
Banbridge
& Craigavon**
Borough Council

BUTTERFLIES AT OXFORD ISLAND



Butterflies can be found almost everywhere there is vegetation. Gardens, parks and open countryside all provide food and shelter for a variety of species.

Some species prefer open grassy areas whilst others like the dappled light of the woodland edge. In Ireland 31 different species of butterfly have been recorded but the number can vary from year to year as some butterflies migrate to Ireland on a seasonal basis.

At Oxford Island National Nature Reserve there are a variety of habitat types. Each area has a range of plants which provide butterflies and their caterpillars with food and places to shelter. Adult butterflies use their long tongues to feed on the sugary nectar that is found inside many flowers. The young, known as larvae or caterpillars, feed on the leaves of many plants, including grasses.

Most butterflies fly between the months of April and September when temperatures are higher and their food plants are in flower.

SOME TERMS EXPLAINED:

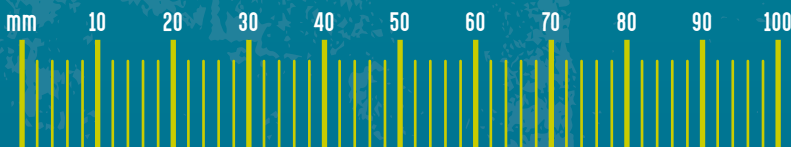
LARVA

The young of an insect. The larva, or caterpillar, hatches from the egg and the larval stage begins.

PUPA

Once fully grown, the larva changes into a pupa, or chrysalis, and the pupal stage begins. The caterpillar inside undergoes a process of change known as metamorphosis and emerges as an adult butterfly.

WINGSPAN
SCALE





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ORANGE-TIP

Anthocharis cardamines

COLOUR: The male orange-tip butterfly is mainly white in colour with unmistakable bright orange tips on the upper wings. The females are white with black wing tips, and both have mottled green underwings.

SIZE: The wingspan ranges from 37 to 49mm.

HABITAT: They are found in meadows and along hedgerows and favour the damp conditions along streams and rivers.

LARVAE: Eggs are laid singly on the stems of cuckoo-flowers and the caterpillars feed on the flowers and developing seed heads. Late developing larvae overwinter as well camouflaged pupae.

FLIGHT: They are usually seen flying in May and June.



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LARGE WHITE

Pieris brassicae

COLOUR: Mainly white with black tips on forewings. The underside of the wing is a creamy white colour.

SIZE: The wingspan is between 58 and 63mm.

HABITAT: Found in flower rich meadows and are commonly seen in gardens.

LARVAE: Eggs are laid in clusters on plants of the cabbage family. The yellow and black caterpillars have ferocious appetites and are often considered a pest by gardeners.

FLIGHT: April to September.



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SMALL WHITE

Pieris rapae

COLOUR: White with small black tips on forewings and one or two black wing spots.

SIZE: Wingspan of 38 to 50mm.

HABITAT: Found in meadows and gardens.

LARVAE: Small white eggs are laid singly on cabbages, other brassicas and on nasturtiums. The green caterpillars can cause severe damage to plants and are also considered to be a pest by gardeners.

FLIGHT: There are two generations and they can be seen in flight from April to October.



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GREEN-VEINED WHITE

Pieris napi

COLOUR: The wings are white with prominent green veins on the underside, visible when the wings are closed. The upper wings have one or more spots on the tips.

SIZE: They have a wingspan of 40 to 52mm. Early generations tend to be smaller.

HABITAT: Found in meadows, hedgerows and also in gardens.

LARVAE: The caterpillars are pale green in colour with dark green stripes and yellow markings. They feed mainly on plants of the cabbage family including cuckoo-flower.

FLIGHT: There are two generations and can be seen in flight from April to August.



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CRYPTIC WOOD WHITE

Leptidea juvernica

COLOUR: The cryptic wood white is a grey-white colour with rounded wings. The males have a black mark on the edge of each forewing and the undersides are white with indistinct grey markings.

SIZE: They have an average wingspan of 42mm.

HABITAT: Commonly found in sheltered grassy sites near areas of scrub and woodland. Adults feed on the flowers of many grassland plants.

LARVAE: The caterpillars feed on the leaves of meadow vetchling and bird's-foot trefoil.

FLIGHT: They can be seen in flight from May to mid July.



@Stephen Foster

SMALL TORTOISESHELL

Aglais urticae

COLOUR: Small tortoiseshell butterflies are bright orange in colour with yellow, black and white markings on the forewing.

SIZE: The wingspan can vary from 45 to 55mm.

HABITAT: The small tortoiseshell butterfly is a popular garden visitor and can be seen in a variety of habitats.

LARVAE: Adults lay eggs in patches of nettles and these plants are the sole food for the larvae. The caterpillars are mainly black with several rows of spines.

FLIGHT: They can be seen in flight from June to August. Adults can live for up to eight months and can overwinter in sheds and garages. If the weather is mild they can be seen as early as March and as late as November.



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SMALL COPPER

Lycaena phlaeas

COLOUR: Bright orange/copper with brown spots and a brown wing margin.

SIZE: The average wingspan is 26mm for the male and 36mm for the female.

HABITAT: They occupy sunny grassland areas and are strongly territorial.

LARVAE: Caterpillars are predominantly green with red and white stripes and feed on sorrel.

FLIGHT: There are two generations, the first flying in May and June and the second in August and September.



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COMMON BLUE

Polyommatus icarus

COLOUR: The upper wings of males are a violet blue with a fine black border. Females have brown wings with orange marking on the edges.

SIZE: The average wingspan is 29mm for the male and 38mm for female.

HABITAT: They are commonly found in dry grassy places where their food plant, bird's-foot trefoil grows.

LARVAE: The caterpillar is small and pale green in colour with yellow stripes. They feed exclusively on bird's-foot trefoil.

FLIGHT: They are in flight from May to September.



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HOLLY BLUE

Celastrina argiolus

COLOUR: A pale blue butterfly, less vivid than the common blue. The wings have a silvery sheen to them with number of small black spots on the underside of the wing.

SIZE: The wingspan ranges from 26 to 34mm.

HABITAT: Open woods, woodland edges and urban gardens and parks where evergreen shrubs and hedges occur.

LARVAE: First generation caterpillars feed on the developing flowers & fruits of holly trees while the second generation feed on the flowers of ivy plants. Caterpillars of the 2nd generation overwinter as a pupa.

FLIGHT: There are two flight periods for this butterfly, the first is from April to June and the second from August to the end of September.



SPECKLED WOOD

Pararge aegeria

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COLOUR: The speckled wood is dark brown with creamy white patches and black spots on its wings.

SIZE: The wingspan is between 46 and 56mm.

HABITAT: This butterfly prefers slightly damp areas where there is tall grass and plenty of shade, they can also be seen in gardens, parks and along hedgerows. Speckled Wood butterflies rarely visit flowers, preferring to feed on honeydew sugary deposits left by aphids on the leaves of trees.

LARVAE: The caterpillars are green with darker green stripes. They feed on grasses and over winter as a larva or a pupa.

FLIGHT: They can be seen in flight from March to September.



MEADOW BROWN

Maniola jurtina

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COLOUR: Mainly orange and brown, with black eyespots on the tip of the forewing.

SIZE: Wingspan is 40mm for the male and 60mm for the female.

HABITAT: Found in meadows and grassy places. They prefer unimproved grassland and the adults are particularly attracted to the flowers of thistle, knapweed and bramble.

LARVAE: The caterpillar is green with white stripes and feeds on grasses. They overwinter and develop into butterflies the following spring.

FLIGHT: Flies between July and September.



SMALL HEATH

Coenonympha pamphilus

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COLOUR: Yellow and orange with brown edges to their wings and a black eye-spot on the underside of the forewing.

SIZE: Wingspan ranges between 33 and 37mm.

HABITAT: Found in drier meadows and flying close to the ground.

LARVAE: The caterpillars are pale green and feed on a variety of grasses.

FLIGHT: Adults are in flight from May until early September.



RINGLET

Aphantopus hyperantus

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COLOUR: Brown with distinctive black eye spots with a white centre and a yellow surround.

SIZE: The average wingspan for a male is 42mm and 52mm for a female.

HABITAT: Found on damp grassland and can tolerate shady sites.

LARVAE: The eggs are scattered over damp grassland and the caterpillars feed on a variety of meadow grasses. The larvae hibernate over the winter to develop into adults the following spring.

FLIGHT: They are usually in flight from June to August. This butterfly is often seen flying on overcast days.



PEACOCK BUTTERFLY

Aglais io

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COLOUR: The upper wing has a striking pattern of red and black with each wing bearing a large eye-like spot acting as a warning to deter predators.

SIZE: The wingspan ranges from 63 to 75mm.

HABITAT: They are mainly found in gardens and on the edges of south facing woodlands and flower rich areas.

LARVAE: The caterpillars of the peacock butterfly are black with spines and they feed only on nettle leaves.

FLIGHT: Adults hibernate during the winter and lay eggs in spring. The new generation fly from July to September.



RED ADMIRAL

Vanessa atalanta

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COLOUR: The red admiral has brown-black coloured wings with red bands and white spots near the tips of forewings, the undersides of the wing are dark and mottled in colour.

SIZE: The wingspan can range from 64 to 78mm.

HABITAT: They can be found along hedgerows and open meadows and also gardens and town centres.

LARVAE: The adult butterflies lay eggs on nettles, upon which the developing caterpillars feed.

FLIGHT: They are usually in flight from June to late September. This is a migratory butterfly and the numbers seen in Ireland depend on the breeding success in southern Europe and the weather conditions at the time of migration. Adults arrive in early summer, breed and the new generation emerges in August and September.

CREATING A BUTTERFLY FRIENDLY GARDEN

The natural habitats for many of our species of butterfly are being lost to farming and development.

Gardens are becoming increasingly important for butterflies and with a few simple steps you can encourage butterflies to visit your garden.



Grow more flowering plants, especially native species. These provide nectar for adult butterflies to feed on.



Leave a patch of long grass as a feeding site for butterflies and a wintering site for caterpillars and pupae.



Grow more native trees and shrubs. These also provide flowers for the adults to feed on and leaves for caterpillars to eat.



Leave a patch of nettles in a corner of the garden. These are the main food plant for a number of different species of caterpillar.



Avoid using chemical sprays and insecticides as these can kill all stages of a butterfly's life cycle.

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