



Butterflies of Scotland

Butterflies shown at life-size, but
there is some natural variation in size

KEY

Vanessids and Fritillaries

Browns

Whites

Hairstreaks, Blues and Copper

Skippers



Comma



Peacock



Painted Lady



Red Admiral



Small Tortoiseshell



Marsh Fritillary



Pearl-bordered Fritillary



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary



Dark Green Fritillary



Ringlet



Meadow Brown



Speckled Wood



Grayling



Wall



Scotch Argus



Mountain Ringlet



Small Heath



Large Heath
polydama



Large Heath
scotica



Large White



Small White



Green-veined White



Orange-tip (male)



White-letter Hairstreak



Green Hairstreak



Purple Hairstreak



Common Blue (male - female)



Holly Blue (male - female)



Small Blue



Northern Brown Argus



Small Copper



Essex Skipper



Small Skipper (male - female)



Large Skipper



Dingy Skipper



Chequered Skipper





At the time of publication in 2020, Scotland has 35 butterfly species which regularly breed here. The caterpillar foodplants (indicated by FP in each account), main flight period and distributions described apply only to Scotland. More details on distribution and descriptions of life cycles can be found on the Butterfly Conservation website, and in the ‘Life Cycles of British and Irish Butterflies’ written by Peter Eeles, and the accompanying UK Butterflies website.

There are occasional sightings of three other species (Camberwell Beauty, Brimstone and Clouded Yellow) but they are not included as they are not yet known to breed in Scotland.

Comma: *Polygonia c-album*. The wings have a distinctive ragged outline. Mostly found near woodland edges and gardens. Overwinters as an adult, and prior to this can be found searching for nectar or sugars from fallen fruit in late summer. FP: mostly Stinging Nettles.

Small Tortoiseshell: *Aglais urticae*. Widespread, and one of the commonest visitors to gardens. FP: mostly Stinging Nettles. Mostly **April – September** but can be seen at almost any time of year as it overwinters as an adult and is prone to becoming active on warm winter days.

Peacock: *Aglais io*. Widespread, a common visitor to gardens. Breeds in Scotland but numbers are boosted in spring by butterflies flying from the south. Overwinters as an adult. FP: mostly Stinging Nettles. **Mar – Oct**.

Painted Lady: *Vanessa cardui*. A migratory species, the Painted Lady cannot overwinter in the UK. Each year, migrants arrive from southern Europe and Africa. FP: mostly Thistles. **May – Sept**.

Red Admiral: *Vanessa atalanta*. A widespread species. The butterfly can breed in Scotland and possibly overwinters in some parts, but most of the adults we see are migrants from the south. FP: mainly Stinging Nettles. **May – Oct**.

Marsh Fritillary: *Euphydryas aurinia*. Found in damp grassland in South Lochaber, Argyll and the Inner Hebrides. A priority species for conservation work due to large declines across Europe. Caterpillars live communally in protective silk web, feeding in late summer and early spring. FP: Devil’s-bit Scabious. **Late May – late June**.

Pearl-bordered Fritillary: *Boloria euphrosyne*. Mostly found in woodland clearings or sunny hillsides, especially where there is bracken upon which the caterpillars bask. Little difference in size between this species and the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, but this species flies earlier in the year, has fewer white markings on the underside of the wing, and often reddish-brown chevrons around the edge of underside of the hindwing (these tend to be black in Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary). FP: Common Dog-violet. **Early May – mid June**.

Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary: *Boloria selene*. Uses several types of habitat where its caterpillar foodplants can be found, including woodland edges, damp grassland and hillsides. More widespread than the Pearl-bordered Fritillary. FP: mostly Marsh Violet but also Common Dog-violet. **June – late July**.

Dark Green Fritillary: *Argynnis aglaja*. A large butterfly and the most widespread of the Fritillaries. Uses a variety of habitats wherever the caterpillar foodplants are present. FP: Common Dog-violet but also other Violets. **June – Aug**.

Ringlet: *Aphantopus hyperantus*. Common in areas of long grass, especially sheltered places near woodland edges and hedgerows. Absent from the north and NW, but the range is expanding. Overwinters as a caterpillar at the base of grass tussocks. FP: vigorous grasses, including Cock’s-foot, Common Couch and others. **Late June – late July**.

Meadow Brown: *Maniola jurtina*. Found in a variety of sunny grassy habitats where the grass can grow long in summer. Present throughout most of Scotland except for some mountainous areas. Overwinters as caterpillars at the base of grass tussocks. FP: Wide variety of grasses including Cock’s-foot, Bents, False Brome and others. **Late June – Sept**.

Speckled Wood: *Pararge aegeria*. Associated with woodlands and woodland edges, but can also be found in gardens and along hedgerows. Widespread but with large gaps in central and eastern areas, although populations are spreading and it is expected that these gaps will be filled over time. FP: Vigorous grasses like Yorkshire-fog, Cock’s-foot and others. **April – late Sept (with peaks in May and Aug)**.

Grayling: *Hipparchia semele*. Mostly a coastal species in Scotland, with a few colonies at rocky inland sites such as disused quarries and brownfields. Requires sunny areas with sparse vegetation and bare ground with rocks. When the butterfly lands it closes its wings and is very well-camouflaged. FP: fine-leaves grasses such as Red Fescue, Sheep’s-fescue, Early Hair-grass and Bents. **Early July – early Aug**.

Wall: *Lasiommata megera*. Mostly found within a few miles of the coast in the SE and SW of Scotland, but populations are expanding inland in the Borders. Often observed basking on bare ground to raise its body temperature. FP: a variety of grasses, including Cock’s-foot, Yorkshire-fog, Bents and False Brome. **Two peaks, in early June and late Aug**.

Scotch Argus: *Erebia epiphron*. Widespread in northern, western and SW parts of Scotland, mostly found in damp ungrazed grassland with tall grasses. Superficially similar to the Mountain Ringlet, but is much larger and has white dots within the eyespots on the upperwings. FP: Purple Moor-grass and other grasses. **Late July – Late Aug**.

Mountain Ringlet: *Erebia epiphron*. One of the most difficult butterflies to see. In Scotland it is only found in grassy mountainous areas of central-western Scotland, mostly between 500m and 900m altitude. FP: mainly Mat-grass, but Sheep’s Fescue and other grasses may be used. **Late June – mid July**.

Small Heath: *Coenonympha pamphilus*. Widespread, found in almost all of mainland Scotland and most islands in areas of short, dry grassland. Appears orange in flight, but the wings are closed quickly on settling. Very similar to Large Heath, only slightly smaller. FP: fine-leaves grasses including Fescues, Bents and Meadow-grasses. **Mid June – mid Aug**.

Large Heath: *Coenonympha tullia*. A more localised species than the Small Heath, mostly found on raised bogs in the lowlands or blanket bogs in the uplands. Two sub-species are recognised in Scotland: the *polydama* sub-species is found in lowland Scotland, has large spots on the underside of the wings and flies in June and July; the *scotica* sub-species is found to the north and west, has no (or very small) spots on the underside of the wings and flies in **July and August**. The *scotica* sub-species can be hard to separate from Small Heath. FP: mostly Hare’s-tail Cottongrass.

Large White: *Pieris brassicae*. Widespread but absent from mountainous areas and parts of the north. Numbers boosted by migrants from southern parts of the UK and Europe each year. Often found in gardens and allotments. Can be separated from Small White by the black tips extending in both directions along the upper wing tip. FP: cultivated brassicas such as cabbage and broccoli. **May – Sept**.

Small White: *Pieris rapae*. Widespread but absent from mountainous areas and parts of the north. Dark tips on upper side of wings usually more faint than those of Large White, and tend to extend further along the top edge of the wing. Mostly found in gardens and allotments. FP: cultivated brassicas. **May – Sept**.

Green-veined White: *Pieris napi*. Found over most of Scotland, in a wide range of habitats such as meadows, riverbanks and woodland edges. The grey tips to the wings are broken along the outer edge, and the underside is very distinctive, with thick grey lines over white or yellowish-green. FP: a variety of wild plants in the brassica family, including Cuckoo-flower, Garlic Mustard, Hedge Mustard and Charlock. **May – Aug in two broods**.

Orange-tip: *Anthocharis cardamines*. A species which has recently spread throughout most of Scotland, but still absent from parts of the far north and islands. Females are similar to other white butterflies, but both sexes have a unique mottled-green and white underwing. FP: Mostly Cuckoo-flower and Garlic Mustard. **May – June**.

White-letter Hairstreak: *Satyrrium w-album*. Only recently found breeding in Scotland after extinction in 19th century, with populations near Coldstream and other parts of the Borders. Flies high in tree tops, difficult to see unless it comes down for nectar. FP: Elm. **June – July**.

Green Hairstreak: *Callophrys rubi*. A widespread species found mostly on moorland, woodland edges and bogs but easily overlooked. The upperwings are brown, but this butterfly closes its wings immediately on landing revealing the bright green undersides. FP: Mostly Bilberry. **May – June**.

Purple Hairstreak: *Favonius quercus*. A very patchy distribution across SW and central Scotland, but probably under-recorded as the adults fly at the tops of mature oak-trees and are mostly active in early evening only rarely descending to ground level. FP: Oaks. **July – Aug**.

Common Blue: *Polyommatus icarus*. The most widespread of the blue butterflies in Scotland, but absent from some mountainous areas. Found in short grassland, heathland, coastal grassland and waste ground. Female upperwings can vary from mostly blue to dark brown. FP: Common and Greater Bird’s-foot Trefoil. **June – Aug**.

Holly Blue: *Celastrina argiolus*. Known regularly only from a small number of sites in the SW, Borders and East Lothian. Superficially similar to Common Blue, but undersides of wings are mostly plain blue-grey with black dots, and found in different habitats such as garden gardens and graveyards. FP: Holly, Ivy. **April – July**.
Small Blue: *Cupido minimus*. The UK’s smallest butterfly. In Scotland almost entirely found on sand dunes and short coastal grasslands on the east and north east coast, with just a few inland colonies. FP: Kidney Vetch. **May – early July**.

Northern Brown Argus: *Aricia artaxerxes*. Patchy distribution in Scotland, with a few populations in Dumfries and Galloway, but mostly in the East from the Borders to Sutherland. Usually found on sunny south-facing slopes and coastal areas. Can appear similar to female Common Blues, but no hint of blue in the upperwings. FP: Common Rock-rose. **Late May – July**.

Small Copper: *Lycaena phlaeas*. Widespread, but absent from parts of the north and mountainous areas. Found in open habitats with short vegetation, including grassland, wasteland and disused quarries. Often seen basking on bare ground, south-facing banks and rocks. FP: Common Sorrel and Sheep’s-sorrel. **May – Sept in two broods peaking in June and Aug**.

Essex Skipper: *Thymelicus lineola*. Present in Scotland as a single colony near Lockerbie. Very similar to Small Skipper, but separation is possible by noting the colour of the front tips of the antennae (black in Essex Skipper and orange in Small Skipper). FP: various grasses, including Cock’s-foot, Common Couch and Meadow Foxtail. **June – Aug**.

Small Skipper: *Thymelicus sylvestris*. A species spreading quickly through southern and central Scotland. Males and females differ slightly, with males having a diagonal dark line on the upper side of the forewings. Found in habitats with tall grass. FP: Grasses including Yorkshire-fog, Cock’s-foot and others. **June – Aug**.

Large Skipper: *Ochlodes sylvanus*. Only slightly larger than the Small Skipper, but has a faint chequered pattern on both sides of the wings. Found in grassy areas, where foodplants grow in sheltered, often damp, situations and remain uncut. Currently only found in southern Scotland, but slowly expanding northwards. FP: Cock’s-foot grass. **June – Aug**.

Dingy Skipper: *Erynnis tages*. This rare butterfly is only found in north east and south west Scotland. In the north east there are small colonies around the Moray Firth and Loch Ness, and further inland in Strathspey. In the south west it is often associated with mine bings and forestry tracks. It is found in sunny, sheltered places with bare ground. FP: Bird’s-foot Trefoil. **May – June**.

Chequered Skipper: *Carterocephalus palaemon*. Restricted to Lochaber and north Argyll, where it can be found in damp, sheltered woodland edges or clearings but also associated with more open sites where foodplant grows beneath Bog Myrtle.. FP: Purple Moor-grass. **Late May – mid June**.

Your sightings of butterflies can help us understand how their populations are doing. Send them to us using the iRecord Butterflies app (available for Android and Apple devices) or email scotland@butterfly-conservation.org for more information on recording butterflies.



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