

10 EASY STEPS TO GET INTO BUTTERFLIES

Don't wait for them to come to you – use our top tips to gain a deeper understanding of these fabulous insects.



Speckled woods often perch in sunny spots.

1 | LOOK CLOSELY

Observe the unique behaviour and 'jizz' (character) of each species. Do they zigzag, spiral upwards or have a direct flightpath? Do they flutter or glide? How do they hold their wings and bodies when at rest?

4 | COUNT 'EM!

Don't just watch – count. Take part in the Big Butterfly Count (this year's kicks off on 17 July: www.bigbutterflycount.org), or carry out regular transect walks along an imaginary corridor 5m wide, noting the species you encounter. There's also the national butterfly-monitoring scheme (www.ukbms.org.uk).

2 | REAR YOUR OWN CATERPILLARS AT HOME

Easy species include the peacock, small tortoiseshell, comma and red admiral (all of which feed on stinging nettles), and large whites (which like brassicas). Keep them in a well-ventilated cardboard box with the sides cut away and a net curtain, gauze or fine muslin glued over the top.

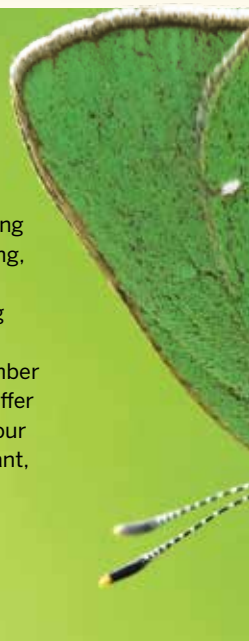
Replenish the foodplant frequently, and watch out for mould.



Prickly gardener: a peacock butterfly larva on a nettle leaf.

3 | KNOW THE KEY FEATURES

Get into the habit of scrutinising both the upper- and under-wing, focusing on key features such as wing shape, patterned wing margins and the number and arrangement of spots. Remember that males and females can differ in both coloration and behaviour – females may be more hesitant, reluctant fliers, for example. Second or third broods may appear different, too, while some species also have variant colour morphs.



5 | TIME IT RIGHT

Go out when activity is peaking – butterflies have distinct flight seasons. Watch the weather – a warm spring may mean adults emerge earlier, but cool or wet conditions can dampen numbers.



8 | USE CLOSE FOCUS

Close-focus binoculars will be a revelation. Invest in a pair that focuses down to 1–2m in order to see sun-basking, courtship, egg-laying and feeding in close detail without disturbing your subjects.

9 | VISIT A HOTSPOT

Plan a few visits to butterfly hotspots. While some British species remain widespread or are strong migrants that can turn up almost anywhere, others are very local and seldom travel far, so require a special trip to be seen. Britain's top spots are listed at www.ukbutterflies.co.uk and in *Discover Butterflies in Britain* by DE Newland (WILDGuides, £21.95; left).



Naturalist David Measures was the first to paint butterflies in flight.



7 | SKETCH OR PAINT THEM

Painting or sketching butterflies, rather than simply snapping them with your macro lens or smartphone, is a great way to train your eye to observe specimens more closely. Due to butterflies' relatively flat, two-dimensional form when viewed from above, it's easy to record wing shape and pattern, though it can be somewhat trickier to capture the poise and vivacity for which these insects are renowned – and celebrated.

From top clockwise: Steve Round; Christopher Smith/Alamy; Matt Cole; Rupert Soskin; Wildlife sketch no.28/Natural History Museum/Bridgeman Images