

'Flying Jewels' by Senior Ranger Jonny Parkes

Butterflies, to many, if not all cultures and traditions are symbolic of transitions, renewal, resurrection, light and celebration. In fact, it is quite hard to find any negative connotations regarding our most colourful invertebrates and why would you want to? These associations, of course, come about firstly because of the metamorphic life cycle of the butterfly. It's easy to see the Christian comparison with the emergence from the pupal stage into the beautiful fully formed adult. But also, its seasonal timing of that emergence, its symbolic arrival as a harbinger of Spring is something everyone (especially if you work outdoors) can be grateful to see.

Here are a few field notes to help you identify some of the more common species you are likely to see.

The Peacock (*Inachis io*) is likely to be the first butterfly of Spring to be spotted due to it hibernating in old buildings, sheds and lofts over winter, making it probably the longest lived of our local Lepidoptera and dispelling the myth that butterflies only live a few days. With four eye-spots on its wings to help put off potential predators, this makes it easy for us to identify. A strong, powerful flier, this butterfly is fairly nomadic and, although it will feirclly protect its territory from other males, it will just as easily abandon it to chase after a passing female.



The Large White (*Pieris brassicae*) is also known as the "Cabbage White" as it is commonly found in brassica crops such as cabbage and sprouts. They are bright white in colour, with black edges to their forewings. The females have two black spots on their forewings which you will not see on the male. The undersides are creamy white with two black spots.



The Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*) is another large and fairly common butterfly. It is predominantly black/brown with red stripes and white occasional markings to the tips of the wings. Migrating (as with other butterflies) from Northern Africa/Southern Europe in Spring through Europe to the U.K, the females lay eggs on arrival producing an influx of new butterflies from July. They can be seen well into the Autumn in Jersey looking for late flowering plants like buddleia or found in orchards, drawn to the sugary fermenting, rotting fruit.



The Comma (*Polygona c-album*) is a fascinating and beautiful butterfly. It gets its name from the small comma-like marks on the underside of the hindwings. However, much more characteristic and striking, are its tattered-looking, scalloped wing edges which, along with the almost fungal/lichen patterned underside of its wings, help it to camouflage itself in leaves when hibernating. The larvae also can be likened to bird droppings. Its preferred habitat is woodland edges and gardens and likes many nectar sources and rotting fruit.



The Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*) is mainly orange and brown with black tips and white spots. The underside is mottled brown with spots. Another migrant species which spreads northwards from desert fringes in Northern Africa. A few years ago we were inundated by these lovely butterflies due to favourable breeding conditions in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco.



The Common Blue (*Polyommatus icarus*) may appear a little later than the others but is the most widespread of the numerous blue butterflies found in Britain. The male and the female of this species are very different in appearance. The male has very bright powdery blue upperwings with black/brown border and a thin white fringe. The females are brown with white and orange spots at the base of the hindwings and have a light blue dusting. Preferring sunny, grassland habitats with food plants such as Common Bird's-foot-trefoil.

