

Common Blue Butterfly

Scientific Name: *Polyommatus icarus*

Irish Name: Gormán coiteann

The Common Blue butterfly can be found throughout Ireland. Other blue butterflies found here, though less common, are the Holly Blue and Small Blue. Of all of them, the Common Blue is the most brightly coloured.

Male and female Common Blue butterflies look different. From above, the male is violet blue and the female is brown with tinges of violet blue on the wings and orange crescent shapes at the edge.



The female Common Blue.



The underside of the Common Blue.

The eggs of the Common Blue are laid singly by the female and the caterpillars hatch out after nine days. These are short, green and furry and feed on young leaves.

The Common Blue usually has two lifecycles in one year. The butterfly lays eggs in May and these will mature into butterflies, which in turn will lay eggs in August or September. The caterpillars which emerge at the end of the summer hibernate over winter and pupa in the spring, beginning the cycle again.

In its caterpillar stage of life, the Common Blue has a honey gland on its body, to which ants are attracted and on which they feed. In return for the honey the ants tend the caterpillar and help protect it from predators. When the caterpillar moves into the pupa stage, ants sometimes bury it, which helps to protect it further.



Images courtesy of Robbie Murphy

The Common Blue is a small butterfly, with a wingspan of about 3 cm.

How to identify butterflies

To learn about Ireland's 32 resident and 3 common migrant butterfly species, the National Biodiversity Data Centre have a 'crash course' in butterfly identification, which can be downloaded for free from their website:

<http://www.biodiversityireland.ie/record-biodiversity/surveys/butterfly-monitoring-scheme/about/how-to-identify-butterflies/>

A handy pocket-sized identification guide can be purchased directly from the Data Centre.

FACT FILE:

Wingspan: 2.5 – 3 cm

Colour: Male is violet blue with a fine black line and white fringe around the edge; underside greyish beige with black, white and orange spots.

Diet: Caterpillar feeds on clover and bird's-foot-trefoil.

Winter Hibernating stage: Caterpillar.

Caterpillar: Green with a darker line down its back and yellow stripes along its sides.

Habitat: Grasslands, gardens, meadows, coastal regions, heaths.

Flight Season: May to September.