



Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe
Galway County Council



Ceangal

Clár den Chomhairle Oidhreachta
A Heritage Council programme



Butterflies

of County Galway

Introduction	2
Butterflies of County Galway.....	2
Why Butterflies are Important	2
Butterfly Biology.....	2
Life Cycles	2
Anatomy.....	3
Citizen Science & Monitoring Schemes.....	4
On the Wing Chart	5
The Butterflies.....	7
Brimstone.....	7
Large White.....	9
Small White.....	11
Green-Veined White.....	13
Orange-Tip.....	15
Brown Hairstreak.....	17
Small Copper.....	19
Common Blue.....	21
Holly Blue.....	23
Red Admiral.....	25
Painted Lady.....	27
Small Tortoiseshell	29
Peacock.....	31
Comma.....	33
Pearl-Bordered Fritillary.....	35
Silver-Washed Fritillary.....	37
Marsh Fritillary	39
Speckled Wood.....	41
Meadow Brown.....	43
Ringlet	45
Small Heath	47
Top Tips for Gardening.....	48
Nectar Preference Plants List	49
Larval Food Plants List.....	50
Glossary	51-52
Bibliography	52

INTRODUCTION

BUTTERFLIES OF COUNTY GALWAY

We have 32 resident butterfly species and three regular migratory species in Ireland. Butterflies are sometimes referred to as a 'model group' of organisms. This is because scientists study them in great detail, which can help work out the impacts of habitat loss, climate change and other biological phenomena, not only on butterflies but also on other species.

This publication profiles 18 butterflies commonly found in County Galway. In addition, it features the Brown Hairstreak, Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Marsh Fritillary butterflies, which are uncommon in most parts of Ireland, but can be found in some areas of County Galway.

WHY BUTTERFLIES ARE IMPORTANT

Butterflies are part of our natural heritage and are much admired; they signify sunshine, beauty and freedom. They are important pollinators and are vital elements of the food chain, providing food for birds, bats, parasitic insects and other insect-eating animals. These flagship insects are indicators of the health of the environment and ecosystems as habitats rich in butterflies tend to have abundant populations of other insects and invertebrates as well and thus give significant insights into the condition of specific environments, the impact of habitat loss and fragmentation, and climate change. Furthermore, the fascinating life cycle, anatomy and behaviour of these insects are valuable subjects for education and scientific study.

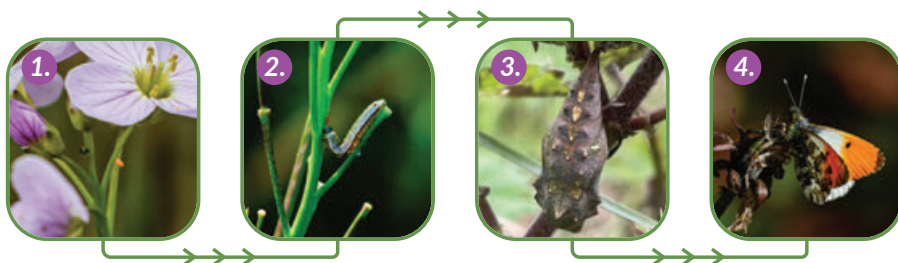
BUTTERFLY BIOLOGY

Butterflies are insects of the order of 'Lepidoptera' (lepis meaning scale and pteron meaning wing: scaly wing) which includes moths as well. They all have four wings which are covered in minute scales which can be brightly coloured. They also have in common that their larvae are caterpillars.

LIFE CYCLE

A butterfly has **four stages** in its life cycle:

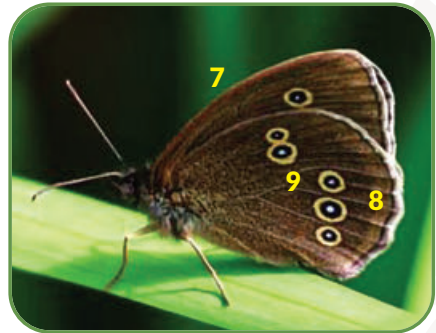
1. Egg, **2. Larva or caterpillar**, including several stages between moults, called 'instars', **3. Pupa or chrysalis**, and **4. Adult butterfly**.



ANATOMY

The body of a butterfly consists of **three parts**:

- The **head (1)** to which two **antennae (2)** are connected. They are 'clubbed' as opposed to feathered as in moths. The antennae are used for smelling food and mates, sensing the sun's position and for balance.
- The **thorax (3)** is the middle section that contains the muscles which power the two pairs of wings and six legs.
- The **abdomen (4)** is the main body segment of insects containing the reproductive and digestive organs.



Butterflies have four wings – **two forewings (5)** and **two hindwings (6)** – that have different patterns on either side of the wings:

- The **upper wing (see above, left)** is more colourful to attract mates;
- The **under wing (see above, right)** is duller to camouflage the insects. It shows the **costal margin (7)** which runs from the head to the tip of the forewing and the **outer margin (8)** which is the outer edge of the wing. Some butterfly species also have 'eyespots' on their **wings (9)**.

Butterflies have a **proboscis (10)** which is a long, coiled probe used for feeding on liquids like nectar, aphid honeydew, tree sap and minerals from puddles.



CITIZEN SCIENCE & MONITORING SCHEMES

The general public can make valuable contributions as citizen scientists by participating in monitoring species like butterflies, collecting data on them (e.g. location, date, habitat, activity) and reporting their findings to the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC). This can be done in a variety of ways.

- **Casual or one-off sightings** can be recorded through the Biodiversity Data Capture App or through Ireland's Citizen Science Portal.
- The **Garden Butterfly Monitoring Scheme** allows participants to record butterflies in their own garden on a more structured basis; the time needed per year is 6 hours made up of 15-minute weekly counts.
- The **Five Visit Monitoring Scheme** is based on a 1 to 2km walk and consists of 5 to 6 hours of monitoring, made up of five 1-hour walks.
- The **Irish Butterfly Monitoring Scheme** is based on a similar walk but is carried out more frequently for 26 to 30 hours during up to 26 walks.

For more information on how you can play your part by monitoring butterflies check out the **National Biodiversity Data Centre**

Visit **www.biodiversityireland.ie**
Or scan the QR code below.



ON THE WING CHART

<i>On the Wing</i>	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Whites (Pieridae)												
Brimstone			Orange	Red	Red	Orange	Orange	Red	Orange			
Large White				Orange	Orange	Orange		Red	Orange	Orange		
Small White				Orange		Orange		Red	Orange	Orange		
Green-Veined White				Orange	Red	Orange		Red	Orange	Orange		
Orange-Tip			Orange	Orange	Red	Orange	Orange					
Hairstreaks, Coppers, Blues (Lycaenidae)												
Brown Hairstreak*							Orange	Red	Red	Orange		
Small Copper				Orange	Orange	Orange		Red	Orange			
Common Blue					Orange	Red	Orange	Red	Orange			
Holly Blue				Orange	Red	Orange	Orange	Red	Orange	Orange		
Vanessids, Fritillaries (Nymphalidae)												
Red Admiral				Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Red	Orange	Orange		
Painted Lady				Orange	Orange	Red	Orange	Red	Orange	Orange		
Small Tortoiseshell			Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Red	Red	Orange	Orange	
Peacock			Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Red	Orange	Orange		
Comma			Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Red	Orange	Orange		
Pearl-bordered Fritillary***				Orange	Orange	Red	Orange					
Silver-washed Fritillary						Orange	Red	Red	Orange	Orange		
Marsh Fritillary**					Orange	Red	Orange					
Browns (Satyridae)												
Speckled Wood				Orange	Orange	Red	Orange	Red	Orange	Orange		
Meadow Brown						Orange	Red	Orange	Orange	Orange		
Ringlet						Orange	Red	Orange				
Small Heath						Red	Orange	Orange				

* Confined to eastern Burren and around Lough Corrib

** Mainly in western half of Ireland

*** Confined to South-East Galway

Orange = Butterflies can be seen

Red = Peak flight

It is widely believed that the word 'butterfly' derives from '**butter-coloured fly**', credited to the yellow hue of the male Brimstone butterfly.



It is widely believed that the word 'butterfly' derives from '**butter-coloured fly**', credited to the yellow hue of the male Brimstone butterfly.

[illegible]

THE BUTTERFLIES

The following butterflies can typically be found in County Galway. They are listed according to the family they belong to: Whites or Pieridae (Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Orange Tip), Hairstreaks, Coppers, Blues or Lycaenidae (Brown Hairstreak, Small Copper, Common Blue, Holly Blue), Vanessids, Fritillaries or Nymphalidae (Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Comma, Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Silver-washed Fritillary, Marsh Fritillary) and Browns or Satyridae (Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Small Heath). Please refer to the glossary for specific terms.

HABITAT

In areas of Galway where the food plants Buckthorn and Alder buckthorn are present, usually woodland, hedgerows and scrub. One of the earliest butterflies to emerge, flying at speed along sunny woodland margins. When mating, they spiral upwards in pairs and then tumble into vegetation to mate.

DESCRIPTION

ADULT

Large size, wingspan: 60-74mm. Males are bright yellow while females are paler. They have pointed wingtips and always rest with their wings closed, resembling a leaf. The underwings have small rust-coloured spots.

EGGS

Pale green, which turn yellow and eventually grey, are laid singly on the underside of the food plant on the sunny side at any height up to 4m.

CATERPILLAR

Green with a white stripe on more mature caterpillars.

PUPA

Green and shaped like a curled leaf.

LARVAL FOOD PLANT

Buckthorn and Alder buckthorn in sunny and sheltered locations.

NECTAR PREFERENCES

A wide range of plants including Primrose, Dandelion and vetches in spring and Purple loosestrife, Common knapweed, Fragrant orchid and Devil's-bit-scabious in summer.

OVERWINTERING

Hibernates as an adult usually amongst Ivy, Holly or Bramble leaves.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Least concern.

Large White / Pieris Brassicae
/ Bánóg Mhór

[illegible]

HABITAT

Found throughout Galway in a wide variety of habitats, including gardens. Flies dynamically and swiftly in sunshine.

DESCRIPTION

ADULT

Large size, wingspan: 58-63mm. Larger than Small White and Green-veined White. White wings with a large area of black which extends down both the costal margin and outer margin on the forewing. This is the only conclusive way to tell the Large White and Small White butterflies apart. Females have two black spots on the forewings.

EGGS

Yellow eggs laid in clusters of 60 or more on the underside of leaves.

CATERPILLAR

The first two instars are lemon yellow, later ones are black and yellow.

PUPA

Greenish or greyish varying to match the background. It hangs by a silk thread on rigid surfaces, such as walls or fences.

LARVAL FOOD PLANT

Wild and cultivated brassicas: Cuckooflower, Garlic mustard, Bitter-cress, Watercress, Wild mustard, Nasturtium and a cultivated brassica species such as cabbage.

NECTAR PREFERENCES

A wide range of plants including knapweeds, thistles, Bluebell, Bugle, Dandelion, Devil's-bit scabious, Field scabious, Ragged robin, Ragwort and Teasel.

OVERWINTERING

Overwinters in the pupa stage.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Least concern.

Small White / Pieris Rapae / Bánóg Bheag

[illegible]

HABITAT

Found throughout Galway in a wide variety of habitats, including gardens. It has a strong, rapid and somewhat erratic flight pattern. The Small White tends to fly close to the ground. Males patrol around food plants looking for females. Females fly differently, taking tight turns when foraging for nectar and more linear when searching for food plants to lay eggs.

DESCRIPTION

ADULT

Medium size, wingspan: 38-57mm, similar size to Green-veined White. White upper wings with dark-grey margins extending further on the costal margin than the outer margin. Pale yellow or white underwings with no veins. Females have two black spots on the upper wing.

EGGS

Pale yellow eggs are laid singly on the underside of a leaf of a larval food plant.

CATERPILLAR

Pale green and cylindrical.

PUPA

Colour varies greatly from cream-white, buff to dull grey or pale yellow to green. It can be found on the foodplant or on buildings, fences or trees.

LARVAL FOOD PLANT

A range of brassicas, especially on Garlic mustard, Wild mustard and Nasturtiums.

NECTAR PREFERENCES

A wide range of plants, including thistles, Bluebell, Bugle, Dandelion, Devil's-bit scabious, Field scabious, knapweeds, Ragged robin, Ragwort and Teasel.

OVERWINTERING

Overwinters in the pupa stage.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Least concern.

Green-Veined White / Pieris napi
(Syn. Pieris Artogeia) / Bánóg Uaine



Upper wing



'Upper Wing' Photo by Rosina Joyce

[illegible]

HABITAT

Found throughout Galway in a wide variety of habitats. Green-veined whites prefer damp areas with lush vegetation. It has a delicate, fluttering flight.

DESCRIPTION

ADULT

Medium size, wingspan: 40-52mm, similar size to Small White. Rounded wingtips. The only white butterfly with a conspicuous green venation on the underside of the hindwing.

EGGS

White eggs laid singly on the underside of a lower leaf of the food plant.

CATERPILLAR

Green and well camouflaged.

PUPA

Green with light brown 'burn' marks found on dry plant stalks in dense vegetation away from the larval food plant.

LARVAL FOOD PLANT

Wild brassicas: Wavy bittercress, Cuckoo flower, Charlock, Hedge mustard.

NECTAR PREFERENCES

A wide range of plants including Dandelion, Bluebells, Bugle, Buttercup, Ragged robin, Ragwort, Red campion, vetches, thistles and garden flowers. Field scabious, knapweeds, Ragged robin, Ragwort and Teasel.

OVERWINTERING

Overwinters in the pupa stage.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Least concern.

Orange-Tip / Anthocharis Cardamines / Barr Buí



Under wing



Caterpillar

[illegible]

HABITAT

Found throughout Galway in damp flowery habitats like wet, unfertilised grassland, vegetated cut-away bog, fens, hedge banks, damp woodland clearings and riverbanks. The Orange-tip will breed in gardens and parks if the foodplant is present. Males patrol along linear features such as hedgerows at about 1m height.

DESCRIPTION

ADULT

Medium size, wingspan: 40-52mm. Similar size to Green-veined White and Small White. The males have characteristic orange wing tips with a black edge. Females also have black wing tips but no orange colouring. Both sexes have mottled green underwings.

EGGS

Greenish-white eggs that turn orange are laid singly below the flower of the food plant.

CATERPILLAR

Greenish with yellow or white lateral stripe.

PUPA

Initially green but progressively turning browner and therefore well camouflaged to resemble a thorn or seed pod.

LARVAL FOOD PLANT

Garlic mustard, Cuckoo flower and other wild brassicas. In gardens also Dame's violet, Wild rocket and Honesty. It is recommended not to cut or strim vegetation before July where food plants are present.

NECTAR PREFERENCES

Violets and Dandelion in April and Cuckoo flower, Bluebell, Ragged robin and Bush vetch in May.

OVERWINTERING

Overwinters in the pupa stage.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Least concern.

**Brown Hairstreak / Thecla Betulae
/ Stiallach Donn**

[illegible]

HABITAT

Found only in the Burren and comparable limestone pavements areas in Counties Clare and Galway and around Lough Derg in County Tipperary. The Brown Hairstreak is elusive as it spends most of its time flying in tree canopies where it feeds on aphid honeydew and sap.

DESCRIPTION

ADULT

Medium size, wingspan: 36-45mm. A brown butterfly with orange bands and white strikes on the underwing. It has a distinctive orange 'tail' to the hindwing.

EGGS

White eggs laid singly on foodplants.

CATERPILLAR

Hairy green to start with, changing to purplish brown.

PUPA

Speckled brown and lightly hairy.

LARVAL FOOD PLANT

Young, low-growing blackthorn

NECTAR PREFERENCES

Mostly feeds on aphid honeydew and sap but will take nectar from Bramble, Devil's-bit scabious, Hemp agrimony, Hogweed, Angelica, Ragwort, thistles, Wild marjoram, Wild carrot and Water mint.

OVERWINTERING

Overwinters as egg.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Least concern.

A circular inset image showing a butterfly with orange and black wings, perched on a green plant stem. The butterfly has orange wings with black spots and markings. It is positioned in the center of the circle, which is set against a green background.



r wing

[illegible][illegible]

HABITAT

Throughout Galway mostly unimproved dry grassland, coastal grey dunes, fallow land or cut-over bog. Small Coppers fly in a swift, jerky flight over open ground, especially where there are bare patches interspersed with low herbs, but only in sunny conditions. They also bask on flowers such as Ox-eye daisies. Leaving grassland unfertilised and not cutting hay in mid-summer is recommended.

DESCRIPTION

ADULT

Small size, wingspan: 26-36mm. Copper-coloured forewings with black spotting and a black margin. The underwing is similar with a grey hindwing.

EGGS

White to grey eggs are laid singly on the underside of leaves of the food plant.

CATERPILLAR

Green with pink dorsal and lateral stripes.

PUPA

Pale brown with black spots.

LARVAL FOOD PLANT

Sheep's sorrel and Common sorrel on neutral soil and Broad-leaved dock on acid soil.

NECTAR PREFERENCES

Feeds on a wide range of plants, including Cuckoo flower, Ox-eye daisy, Common knapweed, Red clover, Bramble, heathers, Water mint, Buttercup, Dandelion, hawkweeds, daisies, Ragwort, thistles, Yarrow and Fleabane.

OVERWINTERING

Overwinters as larvae.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Least concern.

Common Blue / *Polyommatus Icarus* / Gormán Coiteann



Upper wing

[illegible]

HABITAT

Found in sunny areas of dry grassland, including waste ground, quarries and gardens with native flowers, including the larval food plant Bird's-foot trefoil. The Common Blue flies low to the ground in an erratic manner. (The Holly Blue flies high up at the tops of bushes and trees.)

DESCRIPTION

ADULT

Small size, wingspan: 29-36mm. The male Common Blue has a deep blue colour on the upper side of its wings with a white margin. (The Holly Blue has a black and white checkered margin.) The female has orange dots on the outer margin of its upper wings. Both male and female butterflies have black spotting and orange crescent marks on the underwing. (The Holly Blue has no orange markings.)

EGGS

Pale green to white eggs laid singly.

CATERPILLAR

A very small green caterpillar with a black head developing a thin lateral yellow stripe.

PUPA

Olive green and rounded at both ends.

LARVAL FOOD PLANT

Mainly bird's-foot trefoil and sometimes other legumes like Black medick and clovers.

NECTAR PREFERENCES

A range of native plants including Bird's-foot trefoil, Bugle, Fleabane, Kidney vetch, other vetches, knapweeds, Marjoram, Ragwort, thistles, Thyme and White clover.

OVERWINTERING

Overwinters as larva.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Least concern.

**Holly Blue / Celastrina Argiolus
/ Gormán Cuilinn**



Photo by Rosina Joyce

[illegible]

HABITAT

Occasionally seen in Galway. The most likely blue species to be seen in urban gardens, usually where holly is present. Flies high up around the top of bushes and trees in open wooded areas and along hedgerows. (The Common Blue flies close to the ground.)

DESCRIPTION

ADULT

Small size, wingspan: 26-34mm. A blue butterfly with a broad band of dark blue on the upper wing of females and a more indistinct narrow band on the male. The wing margin is black and white checkered. (The Common Blue has a completely white margin.) The underwing is light blue with black spotting. Orange spotting is absent, differentiating it from the Common Blue.

EGGS

Greenish-white eggs are laid singly at the base of an unopened flower bud of the foodplant.

CATERPILLAR

Caterpillars start off white, change to pale green, to bright green and then develop a pink tinge, sometimes with a maroon dorsal stripe.

PUPA

Rounded pale pinkish-brown pupa with black blotches.

LARVAL FOOD PLANT

Holly and Ivy. The eggs of the first generation are laid just below unopened Holly flowers or young berries and a second generation will feed on Ivy. It is important not to cut flowering Ivy.

NECTAR PREFERENCES

A range of native plants including Bramble, Bugle, buttercups, Forget-me-not, Holly, Ivy, Privet, thistles and the honeydew of aphids.

OVERWINTERING

Overwinters as pupa at the base of a plant.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Least concern.

**Red Admiral / Vanessa Atalanta
/ Aimiréal Dearg**



Under wing

[illegible]

HABITAT

Found throughout Galway in a wide variety of habitats, especially where flowers and nettles are present. The Red Admiral is a common migrant from continental Europe. It has a swift, erratic flight and can often be observed basking in sunshine on flowers or warm surfaces like walls.

DESCRIPTION

ADULT

Large size, wingspan: 64-78mm. The upper wing has broad red bands intersecting the black wing. There are white spots near the apex of the forewings. The underwing is mottled brown, black and grey resembling a dead leaf.

EGGS

Green eggs laid singly on the upper side of a leaf.

CATERPILLAR

The caterpillars spin a 'tent' and fasten a leaf around themselves. They are black with a lateral yellow stripe and spines.

PUPA

Reddish-grey, often with a powdery bloom and metallic gold spots.

LARVAL FOOD PLANT

Stinging nettle.

NECTAR PREFERENCES

Feeds on a range of plants, including Bramble, Hemp agrimony, Ivy, Privet, Teasel, thistles as well as on tree sap and overripe fruit.

OVERWINTERING

As adult, but unlikely to overwinter in Ireland. Migrates to continental Europe.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Least concern.

**Painted Lady / Vanessa Cardui
/ Áilleán**



Under wing

[illegible]

HABITAT

Found throughout Galway in a wide variety of habitats. A migrant species from North Africa and the Middle East. It has a fast powerful flight.

DESCRIPTION

ADULT

Large size, wingspan: 58-74mm. Red-and-orange colouration with white spots on the apex of the forewing. It lacks the red banding of the Red Admiral. The underwing is mottled salmon pink with 'eyespot' along the margin of the hindwing.

EGGS

Green eggs laid singly on the upper side of a leaf.

CATERPILLAR

Hairy black.

PUPA

Pinkish grey with spines.

LARVAL FOOD PLANT

Mostly thistles but Common nettle and Viper's-bugloss may also be fed on.

NECTAR PREFERENCES

A wide range of plants, including thistles, Bird's-foot trefoil, hawkweeds, heathers, Ivy, knapweeds, Privet, Ragwort, Devil's-bit scabious and Red clover.

OVERWINTERING

Painted Lady cannot overwinter in Ireland. It migrates south as far as sub-Saharan Africa and returns to Europe in spring.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Least concern.

Small Tortoiseshell / *Aglais Urticae* / Ruán Beag



Caterpillar

[illegible]

HABITAT

Found throughout Galway in a wide variety of habitats, including gardens. The Small Tortoiseshell has a rapid and erratic flight, darting among flowers.

DESCRIPTION

ADULT

A colourful butterfly with black and yellow bands on its forewing and blue spots along the costal margin of the wing. The underwing is dark with some lighter mottling.

EGGS

Green eggs are laid in clusters of about 80 on the underside of leaves of the food plant.

CATERPILLAR

Starts as brownish green with black heads and hairs. As it grows, it becomes dark and develops characteristic yellow stripes along its sides. The caterpillars live communally, often within a self-spun web on nettles, and they move to new plants together.

PUPA

Brown with metallic sheen.

LARVAL FOOD PLANT

Stinging nettle, mostly young, non-flowering plants on the sunny side of a nettle patch.

NECTAR PREFERENCES

A wide variety of plants, including in spring Dandelion, Primrose, Grape hyacinth, Goat willow and Grey willow. In summer Bramble, Devil's-bit scabious, Field scabious, hawkweeds, heathers, Hemp agrimony, Ivy, knapweeds, Marjoram, Privet, Ragwort, thistles, Thyme and Water mint. In late summer Michaelmas daisies and Ice plant in gardens.

OVERWINTERING

Overwinters as an adult, often in sheds and houses.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Least concern.

**Peacock / Inachis io
/ Péacóg**

[illegible]

HABITAT

Found throughout Galway in a wide variety of habitats, generally in the countryside, especially at woodland edges or clearings and in gardens.

DESCRIPTION

ADULT

Large size, wingspan: 63-75mm. A colourful butterfly with blue prominent 'eyes' on the apex of each forewing, similar to the eyespots on a Peacock's feathers. The underwing is very dark, resembling a dead leaf.

EGGS

Green eggs are laid in clusters on the underside of leaves near the top of the food plant.

CATERPILLAR

When first hatched, the pale-yellow caterpillars spin a web to draw the leaves together. Later, they turn black with spines and eventually white spots appear.

PUPA

Green with spines, similar to Small Tortoiseshell pupae.

LARVAL FOOD PLANT

Stinging nettle in a sunny position. It is important not to strim or spray nettles.

NECTAR PREFERENCES

A wide range of plants. In spring the Peacock will feed on Dandelion, Grey willow and Butterbur; in later spring on Hawthorn and in summer on Common knapweed, Teasel, heathers and Devil's-bit scabious.

OVERWINTERING

Overwinters as adult in wood piles, hollow trees and sheds.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Least concern.

Comma / Polygonia C-Album / Camóg



Upper wing

[illegible]

HABITAT

The Comma arrived in Ireland in 2000 in County Wexford as a migrant and has since spread across Ireland. Since 2014, it is both a migrant and a resident. It can be found in County Galway along woodland edges, hedgerows and scrub, and in parks and gardens. Comma butterflies have a rapid and erratic flight.

DESCRIPTION

ADULT

Large size, wingspan: 50-64mm. The only butterfly in Ireland with scalloped wing edges. Orange and brown mottled pattern with a white comma shape on the hind underwing.

EGGS

Eggs are laid singly, near the tip of the upper surface of a leaf at the top of the foodplant. They are green at first, change to yellow and eventually become grey.

CATERPILLAR

Mostly brown, with white, black and orange flecks and spines that act as camouflage, resembling bird droppings.

PUPA

Pale pink to buff resembling a dried leaf.

LARVAL FOOD PLANT

Stinging nettle on damp soil. It is important not to trim or spray nettles.

NECTAR PREFERENCES

A wide range of plants. In spring Comma feed on willow, Lesser celandine and Dandelion, in mid-summer on Bramble and in late summer and autumn on thistles and Devil's-bit scabious, and on ice plants in gardens.

OVERWINTERING

Overwinters in drifts of leaves as an adult. Therefore, it is important to allow leaves to accumulate in gardens.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Not assessed.

Pearl-Bordered Fritillary / Boloria Euphrosyne / Fritileán Péarlach



Photo by Jesmond Harding

[illegible]

HABITAT

Found in South-East Galway and on the Aran Islands in grassy forest clearings, on unimproved dry limestone grassland and on limestone pavement. It flies briskly low to the ground.

DESCRIPTION

ADULT

Medium size, wingspan: 38-47mm. Rich orange colouration with black spots on the upper wing. The underside of the hindwing is bordered by a series of distinct white 'pearls'.

EGGS

Pale green eggs are laid usually singly on the underside of leaves of the foodplant.

CATERPILLAR

Black with white or yellow spines along their backs.

PUPA

Brown dotted with metallic silver spots.

LARVAL FOOD PLANT

Common dog violet.

NECTAR PREFERENCES

A wide range of plants, including Bird's-foot trefoil, bugle, buttercup, Bluebell, Dandelion, hawkweeds, Ragged robin, Selfheal, thistles and Tormantil.

OVERWINTERING

Overwinters as larva.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Endangered.

Silver-Washed Fritillary / *Argynnis Paphia* / Fritileán Geal

[illegible]

HABITAT

Found throughout Galway in grassy forest clearings, gardens and urban parks. Males patrol their territory with a zig-zag flight while females fly in a straight line. The male performs a courtship ritual of a looping flight around the female. It is important to control invasive plants such as Rhododendron and Laurel which shade native woodlands.

DESCRIPTION

ADULT

Large size, wingspan: 69-80 mm. The Silver-washed fritillary is our largest butterfly. It is bright orange with dark spots on its pointed upper wings, with a pale green underside to the hindwings with silvery stripes.

EGGS

One or more cream-coloured eggs laid on the shaded side of tree trunks at 1m or higher, no more than 2m from the food plant.

CATERPILLAR

Brown to black with spines.

PUPA

Pale brown resembling a brown leaf.

LARVAL FOOD PLANT

Violets, especially Common Dog-violet.

NECTAR PREFERENCES

A variety of plants including Bramble, Fleabane, knapweeds, Privet, Ragwort, thistles and Water mint.

OVERWINTERING

Overwinters as larva.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Least concern.

Marsh Fritillary / Euphydryas Aurinia / Fritileán Réisc

[illegible]

HABITAT

The Marsh Fritillary is Ireland's only protected insect and is given protection under the EU Habitats Directive. Found throughout Galway, but it is very habitat-specific. It favours wet grassland, coastal dunes, machair and cut-over bog. This butterfly flies relatively weakly and only in sunny conditions. It can be observed basking or feeding on flowers.

DESCRIPTION

ADULT

Medium size, wingspan: 35-50mm. A colourful butterfly with an orange and cream pattern on the upper wing and angular cream and orange bands on the underside of the hindwing.

EGGS

Yellow eggs laid in large batches on the underside of the food plant near tussocky grass like Purple moor grass or Gorse, heathers and Bog myrtle.

CATERPILLAR

Dark brown or black with a band of white speckles. Caterpillars spin webs on leaves where they feed.

PUPA

Pale grey with rows of bright yellow spots.

LARVAL FOOD PLANT

Devil's-bit scabious.

NECTAR PREFERENCES

A range of plants, including Bugle, buttercups, Cuckoo flower, Dandelion, hawkweeds, knapweeds, Ragged robin, thistles and Tormentil.

OVERWINTERING

Overwinters as larva.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Vulnerable.

**Speckled Wood / Pararge Aegeria
/ Breacfhéileacán Coille**

[illegible]

HABITAT

Found throughout Galway in woodland, grassy forests, clearings, field margins, hedgerows, urban parks and gardens. Males perch in sunny areas and battle with rivals in quick, erratic flights. They are very territorial, often spiralling upwards in a clash. Females usually fly higher in the tree canopy.

DESCRIPTION

ADULT

Medium size, wingspan: 46-56mm. Dark, chocolate-brown wings with cream blotches and a white edge along the margin of the upper wing. The underwing has one eyespot near the apex of the forewing. The hindwing is light brown to grey.

EGGS

Cream coloured eggs laid singly on the food plant.

CATERPILLAR

Pale green with yellow stripes.

PUPA

Pale green.

LARVAL FOOD PLANT

Various grasses.

NECTAR PREFERENCES

Adults feed mostly on aphid honeydew or sap, but take nectar from Bramble, Cuckoo flower, Dandelion, Fleabane, Privet and Ragwort.

OVERWINTERING

Overwinters either as larva or pupa.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Least concern.

Meadow Brown / Maniola Jurtina
/ Donnóg Fhéir



Upper wing

[illegible]

HABITAT

Found throughout Galway in a variety of grassland habitats with a medium to high sward height. It is present along coasts, on limestone, eskers, quarries and cut-over bog, and in woodland clearings, hedge banks, parks and gardens. Meadow Browns have a low and fluttering flight and will even fly in dull weather.

DESCRIPTION

ADULT

Medium size, wingspan: 40-60mm. Larger than the Small Heath. The Meadow Brown's upper wings are pale brown. Females have a bright orange patch near the apex of the forewing and both sexes have one large eye spot with a white pupil on each forewing. The underwing is similar for both with a broad orange spot and one eye spot at the apex. They usually bask with their wings open.

EGGS

Yellow eggs laid singly or sometimes more on grass stalks.

CATERPILLAR

Green and hairy with a yellow lateral stripe.

PUPA

Green with two purple-brown stripes.

LARVAL FOOD PLANT

Various grasses.

NECTAR PREFERENCES

A wide variety of plants, including Creeping thistle, Common knapweed, Bramble, buttercups, Devil's-bit scabious, Fleabane, Hemp agrimony, Marjoram, Privet, Ragwort, Selfheal, Teasel and Yarrow.

OVERWINTERING

Overwinters as larva.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Least concern.

Ringlet / Aphantopus Hyperantus / Fáinneog



Upper wing

'Upper Wing' Photo by Rosina Joyce

[illegible]

HABITAT

Found throughout Galway on a variety of grasslands, including unimproved dry, wet and improved grasslands, field margins and even urban areas. The Ringlet has a bouncing, low-level flight. Unlike most other butterflies, it can be observed flying in overcast conditions and even light rain.

DESCRIPTION

ADULT

Medium size, wingspan: 42-52mm. A uniform brown butterfly with a white fringe on the margins of the wings and eyespots on the apex of the forewing on the upper side. The underwing has haloed eyespots with a white centre. The sexes are alike.

EGGS

Cream to pale brown eggs laid singly at the base of the foodplant.

CATERPILLAR

Beige with a cream lateral stripe and brown dorsal stripe, covered in stubble.

PUPA

Pale buff with dark markings, a blunt head and pointed abdomen.

LARVAL FOOD PLANT

Various grasses.

NECTAR PREFERENCES

A variety of plants, including Bramble, Pyramidal orchid, Fleabane, Hemp agrimony, Kidney vetch, Marjoram, Privet, Ragwort and thistles.

OVERWINTERING

Overwinters as larva.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Least concern.

Small Heath / Coenonympha Pamphilus / Fraochán Beag



Photo by Jesmond Harding

<i>On the Wing</i>	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Small Heath												

HABITAT

Found throughout Galway on unimproved dry grassland as well as in coastal locations. Adults favour areas of grassland with low sward height and abundant flowers and isolated scrub. The Small Heath has a weak, low, bobbing flight and only flies in sunshine.

DESCRIPTION

ADULT

Small size, wingspan: 33-37mm. The Small Heath is smaller than the similar-looking Meadow Brown. It has a pale washed-out look with and eyespot on the forewing.

EGGS

Pale green eggs are laid singly on a variety of wild grasses and on dead plant material.

CATERPILLAR

Depending on the grass colour, the caterpillars are bright green or yellow with a dark green dorsal stripe.

PUPA

Green or yellow with a blunt head.

LARVAL FOOD PLANT

Fine-leaved grasses.

NECTAR PREFERENCES

Rarely seen taking nectar.

OVERWINTERING

Overwinters as larva.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Near threatened due to habitat loss, fertilizer use and sowing of ryegrass, burning of heath in spring, overgrazing or under grazing, coastal erosion and invasive species.

TOP TIPS FOR GARDENING

Most adult butterflies feed on nectar. Native flowers are best as they support a wide range of species which are adapted to distinctive features of the plants. These plants are resilient and compatible with the local climate and the soil conditions, ensuring a secure and balanced environment for every part of the life cycle of the butterfly. This is also important for our native plants as the butterflies play an essential role in their pollination. Therefore, it is important to allow more native plants to grow in gardens.

- Do not use pesticides.
- Control invasive species.
- Grow more native plants as food and for roosting and hibernation.
- Create overwintering habitats by leaving leaf litter on the ground, keeping some thick and uncut vegetation (an area of uncut grasses, nettles or Bramble) and set up some log piles.
- Allow Ivy to flower so butterflies like the Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Brimstone and Comma build up enough energy to overwinter.
- Create a meadow by allowing the grass to grow all summer and cutting annually in September. Commercially sold wildflower mixes are not recommended.
- Reduce mowing in other areas to every three to four weeks.
- Grow pollinator-friendly ornamental plants in sunny and sheltered areas.
- Plant in drifts for easier foraging and better visibility.
- Water flowers with rainwater during droughts to ensure the availability of nectar and mulch around the base of plants to retain moisture.
- Make water available for butterflies. They drink dissolved minerals and salts from muddy puddles. Place a shallow dish with sand or soil and water to create a 'puddling' station for them.
- Leave some windfall fruit for butterflies like Red Admiral and Painted Lady.
- Create basking places by placing rocks or paving slabs in sheltered and sunny locations in flower borders or meadows.

NECTAR PREFERENCE PLANTS LIST

SPRING

Bluebell	Heathers
Bush vetch	Holly
Cuckoo flower	Lesser celandine
Dandelion	Primrose
Forget-me-not	Violets
Grape hyacinth	Willows
Hawthorn	

SUMMER TO AUTUMN

Angelica (Wild celery)	Ox-eye daisy
Bramble	Privet
Bird's-foot trefoil	Purple loosestrife
Bugle	Ragged robin
Buttercups	Ragwort
Common knapweed	Red campion
Devil's-bit scabious	Red clover
Field scabious	Vetches
Fleabane	Teasel
Greater knapweed	Thistles
Hawkweeds	Thyme
Heathers	Tormentil
Hemp agrimony	Water mint
Hogweed	White clover
Ivy	Wild carrot
Kidney vetch	Yarrow
Marjoram	



LARVAL FOOD PLANTS LIST

<i>Butterfly</i>	Larval Food Plants
Whites (Pieridae)	
Brimstone	Buckthorn and Alder buckthorn
Large White	Brassicas (cabbage family)
Small White	Brassicas (cabbage family)
Green-Veined White	Garlic mustard, cuckoo flower, water cress and other brassicas
Orange-Tip	Cuckoo flower and garlic mustard
Hairstreaks, Coppers, Blues (Lycaenidae)	
Brown Hairstreak*	Blackthorn
Small Copper	Common sorrel and sheep's sorrel
Common Blue	Bird's-foot-trefoil
Holly Blue	Holly and Ivy
Vanessids, Fritillaries (Nymphalidae)	
Red Admiral	Nettle
Painted Lady	Thistles
Small Tortoiseshell	Nettle
Peacock	Nettle
Comma	Nettles
Pearl-bordered Fritillary***	Common Dog Violet
Silver-washed Fritillary	Common Dog Violet
Marsh Fritillary**	Devil's-bit scabious
Browns (Satyridae)	
Speckled Wood	Grasses
Meadow Brown	Grasses
Ringlet	Grasses
Small Heath	Fine Grasses

* Confined to eastern Burren and around Lough Corrib

** Mainly in western half of Ireland

*** Confined to South-East Galway

GLOSSARY

A

Abdomen: the segmented tail of a butterfly containing its vital organs

Antennae: a pair of sensory feelers attached to the head of a butterfly

Antenna clubs: the ends of each of the antennae

Apex: the top corner of a butterfly's wing

B

Basking: butterflies absorbing heat from the sun to warm their bodies

Brassica: a plant of the cabbage or mustard family which typically has four-petaled flowers and slender seed pods, e.g. Garlic mustard and Hedge mustard, Cuckoo flower, Water cress, Wavy bittercress, Charlock

C

Chrysalis: the 'pupa' – the third stage in the life cycle of a butterfly

Citizen science: a type of research carried out by non-professional volunteers collecting and analysing data

Coastal grey dunes: stable dunes, fixed by root systems of vegetation of lichens, mosses, grasses and wild flowers

Costal margin: Frontal edge running from the head out

D

Dorsal: relating to the upper side; the dorsal wing is the upper wing

E

Eyespots: circular markings that are highly distinguishable from the rest of the wing pattern to confuse predators, deflect attacks and divert attention away from more vital body parts. They are also important for courtship and mate identification and come in a wide range of colours and sizes

F

Fallow land: land that is kept out of production to recover its fertility and organic matter, sometimes planted with a 'cover crop' creating green manure

Food plant: or host plant - a plant providing food for the butterfly caterpillars

Forewing: the wing closest to the head

H

Habitat: the natural home or environment of an organism

Hibernation: a prolonged period of inactivity that allows butterflies to survive when the weather is harsh and their food is scarce

Hindwing: the wing closest to the rear of the body

I

Instar: The phase between moults in the life of larvae

L

Larva or caterpillar: - the active immature form of a butterfly

Lepidoptera: (meaning scaly wing) the order of insects that comprises butterflies and moths

M

Migrant: a butterfly that seasonally moves or migrates from one geographical area to another

O

Outer margin: the outer part of the wing

P

Patrolling: flying over a particular area when searching for a mate

Perching: landing on a tall plant or other object when searching for a mate

Proboscis: the elongated feeding tube attached to the head of the butterfly

Pupa: the 'chrysalis', the third stage in the life cycle of a butterfly

R

Roosting: resting, finding shelter from predators and the elements, and conserving energy

T

Thorax: the body section between the head and the abdomen

V

Venation: the arrangement of veins in an insect's wing

W

Wingspan: the distance between the tops of a butterfly's wings

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A guide to butterflies of Ireland. Dublin Naturalists' Field Club

Discovering Irish Butterflies & their Habitats. J.M. Harding

Gardening for Butterflies – Ireland's Butterfly Series. National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC)

Guide to Butterflies of Ireland. J.M. Harding

Ireland's Butterfly Series: Marsh Fritillary. National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC)

Ireland's Butterfly Series: Small Heath. National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC)

Nature's Way – Pollinators in Ireland. An Taisce

Pollinator-friendly Planting Code. All-Ireland Pollinator Plan

Swatch – Ireland's Biodiversity series 'Butterflies' available from National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC)

The Irish Butterfly Book – A complete guide to butterflies of Ireland. J.M. Harding

Top 10 Pollinator-friendly Plants for Different Situations. All-Ireland Pollinator Plan

AUTHOR

Kay Synott

GRAPHIC DESIGN

David Lawless

PRINTING

KPW

PHOTOGRAPHY

All photographs by Kay Synott, Living Gardens, unless otherwise stated

SCIENTIFIC GUIDANCE

J.M. Harding

PROOFREADING

Marianne ten Cate

Cathal Mac Aodh Bhuí

PROJECT TEAM

Kay Synott, Living Gardens

Rosina Joyce, Galway County Council

ADMINISTRATION SUPPORT – GALWAY COUNTY COUNCIL

Ita Gordon

Gina O'Shaughnessy

Ann Power

Martina Creavan

Cover Photographs:

Front – Marsh Fritillary Male

Back – Orange-tip Male

This project was delivered with the support of Galway County Council and National Parks and Wildlife Service through the Local Biodiversity Action Fund 2025. It is an action of the National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030 and Galway County Heritage and Biodiversity Plan 2024-2030. Galway County Council is a Local Authority Partner of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan.

© 2025 All rights reserved.

Reproduction, even in part, without authorisation is not permitted.

Submit your butterfly sightings to the
National Biodiversity Data Centre:

Visit records.biodiversityireland.ie
Or scan the QR code below.



Proudly supported by:



Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe
Galway County Council



Ceangal

Clár den Chomhairle Oidhreachta
A Heritage Council programme



NPWS

An tSeirbhís Páirceanna
Náisiúnta agus Iadhlúga
National Parks and Wildlife
Service