

## ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT BUTTERFLIES

**What is the best place to look for butterflies?** Usually open, sunny areas with lots of flowers. Butterflies like it warm and sunny, so wait until the day warms up to at least 65 degrees.

**How do butterflies know where to lay their eggs?** A female butterfly first recognizes the proper hostplant visually, then she lands on it and "reads" the chemical signature of the plant with sensors in her feet to confirm whether it is suitable. She may also check whether other eggs have been laid on the plant; some species will avoid other eggs, while some prefer their presence.

**What are a butterfly's antennae used for?** The antennae are studded with thousands of sensory cells that provide information similar to taste/smell in humans. These enable the butterfly to detect nectar and the chemical signals of the opposite sex.

**Can butterflies hear?** At least some adult butterflies have organs that can detect airborne sound, although this sense is probably very weak compared to their sense of vision and taste/smell.

**Why do I see butterflies forming groups on damp ground?** This behavior is called "puddling," and is generally indulged in by newly emerged males that are absorbing various nutrients to pass on to females when they mate.

**Is it OK to collect butterflies?** These days, there is no need to kill butterflies to identify them learn about them, and enjoy them. Using a butterfly field guide and close-focus binoculars, you can see everything needed to identify the vast majority of species, and digital cameras make it possible to take fantastic close-up photos of living butterflies under natural conditions.

**How long does it take a butterfly egg to develop into an adult?** The rule of thumb is about 45 days: 4–10 for the egg phase, 21–28 for the caterpillar, and 7–14 for the pupal phase. This can vary from as little 3 weeks to more than 2 years (for Arctic species).

**How does a butterfly regulate its temperature?** Basking—by spreading the top surface of the wings to the sun, or by leaning over to the side to expose the bottom wing surfaces on one side—is the commonest method that butterflies use to warm up. Some butterflies can "shiver" (by rapidly contracting their muscles) to raise their temperature 15–20 degrees above their surroundings. In very hot weather, butterflies will seek shade to avoid overheating.

**How do butterflies find mates?** Males use two behaviors, "perching" and "patrolling," to find females. Perchers establish a territory within which they sit on a conspicuous perch and watch for passing females. Patrollers fly continuously while searching for females. Males may also produce chemical signals to attract females.

**How fast can a butterfly fly?** Some skippers can fly more than 50 mph for short distances, but "true" butterflies seldom fly faster than 20 mph.

**Where do the colors on a butterfly's wings come from?** Some colors, including iridescence, are "structural"—that is, they are produced by distortion of light passing through the complicated structures of the scales on the wings. Other colors are produced by pigments, substances that absorb all wavelengths of light **except** the wavelength of the color that is reflected (and seen by our eyes).

**What is the smallest butterfly in North America?** Several species are tiny but perhaps the smallest is the aptly named Pygmy Blue, which is no bigger than the nail on your pinky finger.

**What is the biggest butterfly in North America?** Swallowtails are among our largest butterflies. The Giant Swallowtail and Eastern Tiger Swallowtail can be up to 4 inches from wingtip to wingtip.

The New Jersey Butterfly Club is a chapter of the  
North American Butterfly Association

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