



Silvery Blue

Adult Lifespan

As a rule of thumb, the larger the butterfly, the longer the adult lifespan. The average lifespan of an adult butterfly is ten days, but can vary from a few days up to six months.

A short life span means it's possible to have several life cycles within each year: Red Admirals have several life cycles, Lorquin's Admirals have two and the Silvery Blue has one.



Lorquin's Admiral



Red Admiral



Checkered White



Marine Blue

Picky Eaters?

Most adults nectar (feed) on small flowers, rotting fruit and fresh animal scat. But some, like Variable Checkerspots and Marine Blues, are more picky. They nectar on Yerba Santa or Buckwheat. Just like toddlers have different food preferences, so do caterpillars. Marine Blues eat Lupine leaves and Checkered Whites eat Mustard leaves. For butterflies to survive, food for both adults and caterpillars must be available.



Variable Checkerspot



Sara Orangetip

Basking in the Sun

Butterflies are cold blooded - they bask with their wings open in the morning sunshine when the temperature reaches about 70-80 degrees.

Sara Orangetips also angle their wings towards the sun so that the sunlight reflects onto and is absorbed by its dark body.

When it gets too hot, some butterflies close their wings, like this Painted Lady.



Painted Lady

Catch me if you can... with a camera

Please enjoy our butterflies but stay on the trail and catch them only with your camera. These photos were taken by MRCA volunteer Paul A. Levine in Towsley and Wiley Canyons.

Butterflies of Towsley Canyon



Pale Swallowtail

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California Ringlet

Movement as Deception

The California Ringlet flies in an erratic pattern and will suddenly drop down and hide in the grass.

The Acmon Blue has small eyespots but attracts attention to them by fluttering .

Some butterflies like the Fiery Skipper rely on speed to get away. They can fly up to 50 Km per hour, more than twice the average speed of a butterfly.



Acmon Blue



Fiery Skipper



Cabbage White

Let the Biter Beware

Some butterflies use bright and contrasting colors as a warning sign to predators. They taste horrible and/or are poisonous.

Cabbage White butterflies feed on mustard plants - oils derived from these plants are poisonous to birds. White is a visible color and serves as a warning.

Monarchs caterpillars feed on milkweed - which contain cardiac glycosides that are distasteful and poisonous to birds. The colorful adult Monarchs retain this poison.

Other butterflies have learned to mimic this coloration, even though they are not poisonous. Do you see other butterflies in this brochure with orange/black/white coloration?



Monarch Butterfly



California Sister



Funereal Duskywing

Hiding in Plain Sight

Some butterflies use coloration and patterns to blend in with their environment.

California Sisters "puddle" (gather together and take in water and nutrients) near moist and muddy areas. Funereal Duskywings blend into their dull colored background. But you don't have to be drab to blend in - take a look at the Behr's Metalmark below.



Behr's Metalmark



Gray Hairstreak

Masquerade

Swallowtails and Hairstreaks have appendages on their hind wings that resemble antennae - which are normally found on the head, the most vulnerable part of the body. But the birds are fooled into attacking the "tail", which breaks off and allows the butterfly to escape.

Notice the size and location of the "eyespot" on this Buckeye. The size of the "eye" fools a predator into thinking it's a larger and potentially more dangerous animal. And if the predator decides to attack anyway, it will go for the "false" eye and the Buckeye will be able to escape.



Buckeye