

Butterflies (Rhopalocera) are [insects](#) that have large, often brightly coloured wings, and a conspicuous, fluttering flight. The group comprises the [superfamilies Hedyloidea](#) (moth-butterflies in the Americas) and [Papilionoidea](#). Butterfly fossils have been dated to the [Paleocene](#), about 56 million years ago. ^{[[citation needed](#)]}

Butterflies have a four-stage [life cycle](#), as like most insects they undergo [complete metamorphosis](#). Winged adults lay eggs on the food plant on which their [larvae](#), known as [caterpillars](#), will feed. The caterpillars grow, sometimes very rapidly, and when fully developed, [pupate](#) in a [chrysalis](#). When [metamorphosis](#) is complete, the pupal skin splits, the adult insect climbs out, expands its wings to dry, and flies off.

Some butterflies, especially in the tropics, have several generations in a year, while others have a single generation, and a few in cold locations may take several years to pass through their entire life cycle. ^{[[citation needed](#)]}

Butterflies are often [polymorphic](#), and many species make use of [camouflage](#), [mimicry](#), and [aposematism](#) to evade their predators.^[1] Some, like the [monarch](#) and the [painted lady](#), [migrate](#) over long distances. Many butterflies are attacked by [parasites](#) or [parasitoids](#), including [wasps](#), [protozoans](#), [flies](#), and other invertebrates, or are [preyed upon](#) by other organisms. Some species are pests because in their larval stages they can damage domestic crops or trees; other species are agents of [pollination](#) of some plants. Larvae of a few butterflies (e.g., [harvesters](#)) eat harmful insects, and a few are predators of [ants](#), while others live as [mutualists](#) in association with ants. Culturally, butterflies are a popular motif in the visual and literary arts. The [Smithsonian Institution](#) says "butterflies are certainly one of the most appealing creatures in nature".^[2]

