

COMMON BLUE BUTTERFLY

Polyommatus icarus

SIZE: 3.5cm wingspan

HABITAT: Road verges, meadowland, woodland clearings, gardens and cemeteries

FOOD: Caterpillars eat bird's-foot-trefoil, clover and rest harrow; adults drink nectar from flat-headed flowers, white and red clovers, knapweeds, ragworts and thistles



FAST FACTS

- Male common blues have violet-blue upper wings with grey-beige undersides and are bright and easy to spot. The females are less obvious and in southern England their upper wings are often almost completely brown. The caterpillars are short, green and furry.
- There are 2 broods of butterflies each year (or even three if it's warm) flying in May / June and again in August / September. After a female has laid her eggs, it takes 1 - 2 weeks for the larvae to appear. The caterpillars then undergo 5 stages of development. They may pupate later in the summer - or not until the following spring. They spend around 2 weeks in their chrysalis, which is olive green or brown in colour and is formed on or very close to the ground by a food plant. The adults may live for around 3 weeks after they emerge.
- Like many other species, common blue caterpillars secrete substances containing a nutrient that attracts ants. In return, the ants help protect the caterpillar from predators.
- Spot the adult butterflies between May and September. The caterpillars are around for much of the year.

ENDANGERED IN WANSTEAD

Although the common blue butterfly is widespread and its conservation priority is classed as low, in places around the UK there are local declines in its range - and Wanstead is an example of that. Locally, the best places to see it are areas of unmown grassland in Wanstead Park and on Wanstead Flats, but numbers in both locations have declined. Frequent mowing of grass removes the wildflowers on which the caterpillars and adults alike feed.

More information: www.butterfly-conservation.org/butterflies/common-blue

Help scientists track butterfly populations. Report sightings at www.gigl.org.uk/submit-a-record/

WREN WILDLIFE GROUP - LONDON WILDLIFE TRUST - WILD WANSTEAD

Find out more at www.wildwanstead.org/endangered

HELP PREVENT THEIR EXTINCTION

- Plant birds-foot trefoil and white clover in your garden for caterpillars - they're pretty wildflowers that will tumble out of pots or can help spread over paving to green it up.
- Create a beautiful 'Butterfly Border' packed with flowers loved by the adult insects. Find out how to do it at www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/give-nature-a-home-in-your-garden/garden-activities/growflowersforbutterflies/.
- Use the edges of your garden to create a habitat where caterpillars and other insects can shelter during winter. Grow ivy over fences - it's a wonderful plant for wildlife - or add a row of native shrubs along your boundaries.
- Don't use pesticides and lobby the council to stop using them.

