



# Munching Caterpillars

**Butterfly  
and Moth  
Life Cycles**

**1. Egg**



**2. Caterpillar**



The life cycle of butterflies and moths is one of nature's most amazing processes. There are more than **2,500 species** of moth and around **60 species** of butterfly in the UK. Each one does things slightly differently but there are four **clear stages** of the life cycle that they all have in common, the egg, the caterpillar, the pupa and the adult moth or butterfly.

**3. Pupa  
(Chrysalis)**



**4. Adult Moth  
or Butterfly**



**Caterpillars are eating machines. They can grow to 27,000 times their original weight!**

more details overleaf...



Butterfly Conservation:  
Company limited by guarantee, registered in England (2206468)  
Registered Office: Manor Yard, East Lulworth, Wareham, Dorset, BH20 5QP  
Tel: 01929 400 209  
Charity registered in England & Wales (254937) and in Scotland (SCO39268)

[www.munchingcaterpillars.org](http://www.munchingcaterpillars.org)



**Butterfly  
Conservation**  
Saving butterflies, moths and our environment



heritage  
lottery fund  
**LOTTERY FUNDED**



## 1. Egg

It all starts with the egg. Moths and butterflies lay very small eggs, sometimes in clusters and sometimes on their own. Most of the time the female lays her eggs on or near a plant that her caterpillars

like to eat as they can be extremely fussy eaters! The eggs have a special hard shell to protect the caterpillar that is growing inside.

## 2. Caterpillar

Once it has developed, the caterpillar (also called a larva) will emerge from the egg by making a hole. Often the shell of the egg will be its first meal before it moves on to plants. Caterpillars come in an amazing range of shapes, colours and patterns. Some are brightly coloured, some are carefully camouflaged and some are incredibly hairy. They have three pairs of legs, although it can look like they have many more as caterpillars have extra 'prolegs' to help them get a good grip on their favourite food plant.

The main job of the caterpillar is to EAT and GROW! They eat and eat until they are too big for their own skin. The caterpillar then sheds its skin and emerges with a new larger skin, ready to eat some more.



## 4. Pupa (Chrysalis)

Eventually, the caterpillar will stop eating and look for a place to pupate. This is when the amazing process of 'metamorphosis' (meaning to change shape) takes place. Some caterpillars pupate attached to their foodplant, while others make a cocoon or burrow into the ground. The change from caterpillar to adult butterfly or moth may take from just a few days to many months depending on the species. The body of the caterpillar is broken down and reformed to make up the adult.



## 4. Adult Moth or Butterfly

The adult butterfly or moth finally emerges by splitting the skin of the pupa and crawling out. At first they are damp and wrinkled, but they pump fluid into their wings until they are dry and strong enough to fly. They drink nectar from flowers, using a special straw-like mouth part called a 'proboscis'. This provides them with much needed energy to fly.

The wings of adult moths and butterflies are covered in tiny scales. The beautiful colours and patterns of moths and butterflies vary greatly depending on the species.

The job of the adult moth or butterfly is to mate so that the whole cycle can begin again...



Photos by kind permission of James Weightman



Butterfly Conservation:  
Company limited by guarantee, registered in England (2206468)  
Registered Office: Manor Yard, East Lulworth, Wareham, Dorset, BH20 5QP  
Tel: 01929 400 209  
Charity registered in England & Wales (254937) and in Scotland (SCO39268)

[www.munchingcaterpillars.org](http://www.munchingcaterpillars.org)

 **Butterfly Conservation**  
Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

 **heritage lottery fund**  
LOTTERY FUNDED