

BUTTERFLIES AND MOTHS

INFO SHEET

Butterflies and moths (collectively known as Lepidopterans) are among the world's most beautiful arthropods. They are also among the most numerous; at least 180,000 species have been described to date, representing approximately 10% of the total described species of living organisms on Earth.

Many subtle characteristics distinguish the two groups from one another. Generally (but not always) moths have feathery antennae, and usually (but also not always) they fly at night. Whereas butterflies often have narrow, club-shaped antennae, and most species fly during the day.

For centuries, naturalists have been bewitched by the surreal beauty of butterflies and moths, and it is easy to see why. Lepidopterans have almost magical qualities; tiny caterpillars emerge from drab eggs and grow into weird and wonderful forms before pupating. Inside the (often) strangely-shaped pupae and cocoons, the mysterious process of metamorphosis stirs, transforming the caterpillar into a totally different, elegant and colourful winged form.

Image 1: A male comet moth (*Argema mittrei*);

Image 2: The European peacock butterfly (*Aglais io*);

Image 3: The caterpillar of the luna moth (*Actias luna*).



How to keep butterflies and moths

The following is a brief summary and does not include all of the information required to look after these exquisite creatures. If you are interested in keeping butterflies and moths, please refer to the sixteen page butterflies and moths chapter in the *Weird and Wonderful Pets* book.

Rearing butterflies and moths takes you on a journey following the lifecycle of these fascinating creatures. Many species are easy to rear and will live for several months in captivity.

Butterfly farms often sell eggs, caterpillars, pupae and cocoons, however often it is most rewarding to start with eggs. Newly emerged caterpillars can be kept in a variety of enclosures, including fish tanks made of glass or plastic, mesh butterfly boxes or terraria. Provide plenty of space for your caterpillars to move around and shed their skins.

Each species of butterfly and moth caterpillar has its own specific requirements concerning temperature, humidity and food leaves (see the butterflies and moths chapter in the *Weird and Wonderful Pets* book). Many species need heating, others can be kept at room temperature. All require leaves (as food), which should be placed into the enclosure as small branches stood in a pot of water with a cover to prevent caterpillars from falling in and drowning.

After many weeks of munching, the caterpillars grow and eventually pupate before finally emerging as adult butterflies and moths.

Many butterflies and moths drink nectar from sweet fruit, and so may live for up to several months, however some moths are wholly incapable of eating in their adult form, and live for two weeks or less. After mating, hundreds or even thousands of new eggs are laid, and the amazing process begins again.

For more information, see the *Weird and Wonderful Pets* book.

Image 4: A monarch butterfly caterpillar (*Danaus plexippus*) pupating;

Image 5: A monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) emerging from a pupa;

Image 6: An adult luna moth (*Actias luna*);

Image 7: An adult Atlas moth (*Attacus atlas*).



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**Buy the *Weird and Wonderful Pets* book
to discover the biology, ecology, diversity
and how to keep butterflies and moths.**

**To order your copy visit:
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