



Common Blue Butterfly: *Polyommatus icarus*

This gorgeous, native butterfly is one of my favourites out of all our butterflies. It is small, with a wingspan of only one inch, but it shimmers with such beauty, and I remember trying to count the orange spots on the edge of the wings as an excited, small child. This lovely butterfly has declined so much it cannot now live up the name of being a common sight.

Previously widespread from North Africa to the Arctic, the usual fatal combination of loss of habitat, overuse of pesticides, herbicides and intensive farming have all taken their toll on the Common Blue. More roads and housing also impact negatively on butterflies, along with many other native species.

One of seven species of blue butterflies in Britain, they emerge as adult butterflies from June, and all have very specific plants on which they lay their eggs. Most of these are wild flowers, which are in decline themselves. As ever, if we don't have a richly diverse plant population, with healthy soil, then the whole food chain suffers.

The caterpillars of the Common Blue feed mainly on clover, birdsfoot-trefoil and rest harrow. They are bright green with a distinctive black head, a dark line down their back and paler stripe at each side of their body. In our fabulous North, they will only have one brood usually, but with global warming they may catch up with their Southern relatives, who can have up to three broods each year. Autumn caterpillars are able to overwinter, and emerge the following spring.



Question: How can gardeners and farmers best support our native butterflies, and those migrating to us across the water?

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