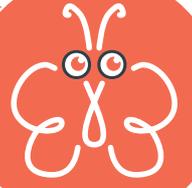


## Spotter's guide – small tortoiseshell butterfly



Adult - upper wing



Adult - under wing

### Quick facts

**Scientific name:** *Aglais urticae*

**Habitat**

Urban and rural areas

**Food plant**

Nettles

**Behaviour**

Active during the day, with a peak in activity during sunny weather above 14°C

### Vital statistics

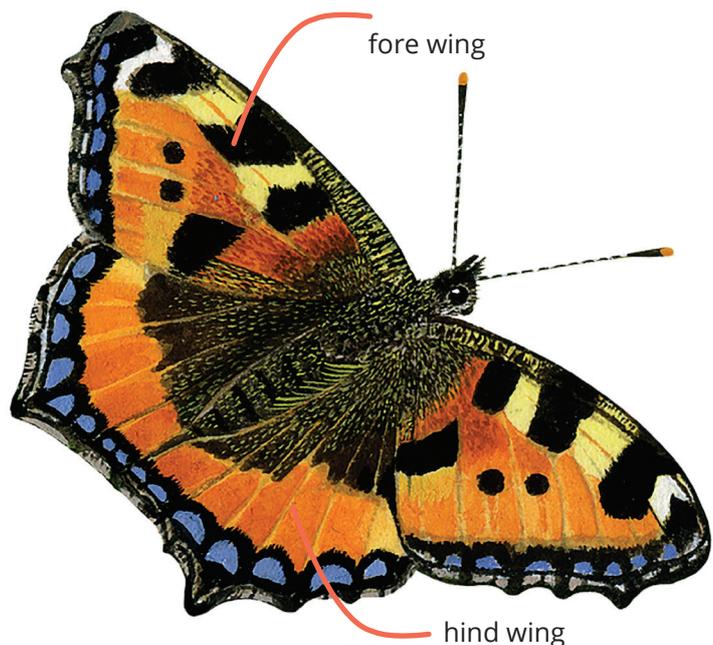
**Wingspan:** 45 – 60 mm

**Upper wing:** Bright orange and black

**Fore wing:** White patch close to the outer top edge, with blue crescents along the edges

**Hind wing:** Blue crescents along the edges

**Under wing:** Dark and light brown in colour



# Identifying other similar-looking butterflies

## Large tortoiseshell butterfly



**Wingspan:** 68 – 75 mm

**Description:** Rare sightings may be migrants from the continent. Larger than the small tortoiseshell, paler, with blue crescents faint or absent.

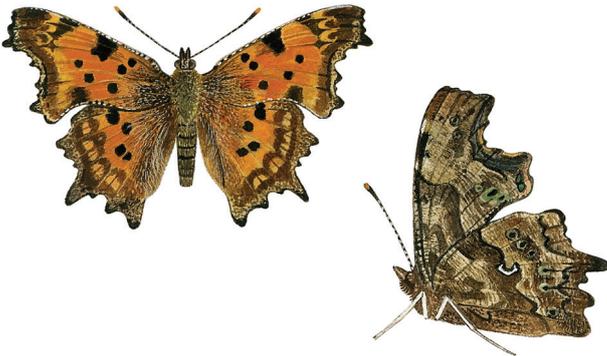
## Painted lady butterfly



**Wingspan:** 58 – 74 mm

**Description:** A migrant species from Africa, appearing in the UK in late summer with an ornate under wing.

## Comma butterfly



**Wingspan:** 50 – 64 mm

**Description:** A white 'comma' mark on the under wing, with jagged wing edges.

## Peacock butterfly



**Wingspan:** 63 – 69 mm

**Description:** Larger than the small tortoiseshell, with four 'eyes' visible on wing patterns.

## Red admiral butterfly



**Wingspan:** 64 – 78 mm

**Description:** Larger than the small tortoiseshell, with velvety black wings intersected with bright red bands.

# Identifying lifecycle stages

## Eggs



Small tortoiseshell butterflies lay their eggs on sheltered nettle plants in direct sunlight. Eggs are laid in a heap towards the top of the plant and on the underside of the leaves.

Batches of 80 – 100 eggs are laid from late April throughout May, with a second brood laid between July and August. They take around ten days to hatch into caterpillars.

Eggs are round, green, and measure 2 – 3 mm. Nine lines run from the centre of the top to the bottom of the egg.

## Chrysalis



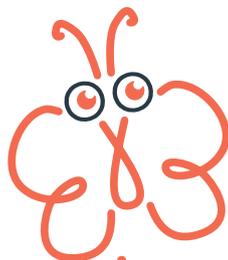
**Length of time:** 2 – 4 weeks

**Measurements:** 20 – 22 mm

### Characteristics:

- Sharply pointed head
- Gentle wave-shaped surface, with six points on the upper curved section
- Coppery-green to speckled light brown in colour, with a metallic sheen

## Caterpillars



Small tortoiseshell caterpillars grow in five stages called instars. In each instar the caterpillar grows before moulting its skin.

Throughout the five instars, which take around four weeks, caterpillars grow from just 1.25 mm to 22 mm.

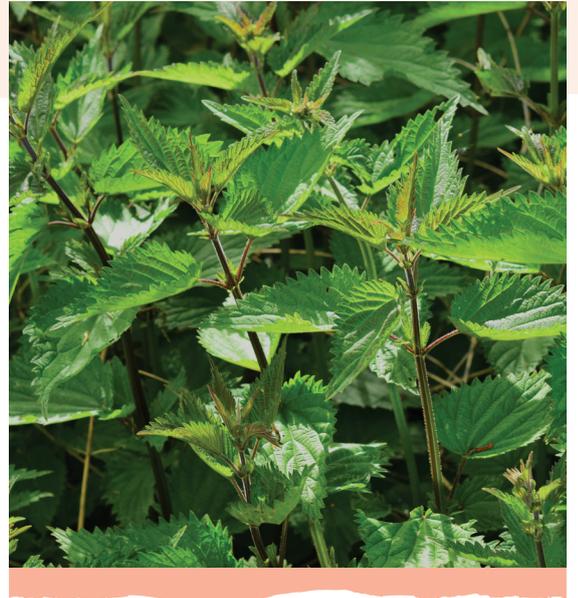
In the early stages, caterpillars can be found in large groups. They later separate to feed on nettle leaves before finding a sturdy ledge to hang from head first, to change into a chrysalis.

In each instar there is a change in appearance:

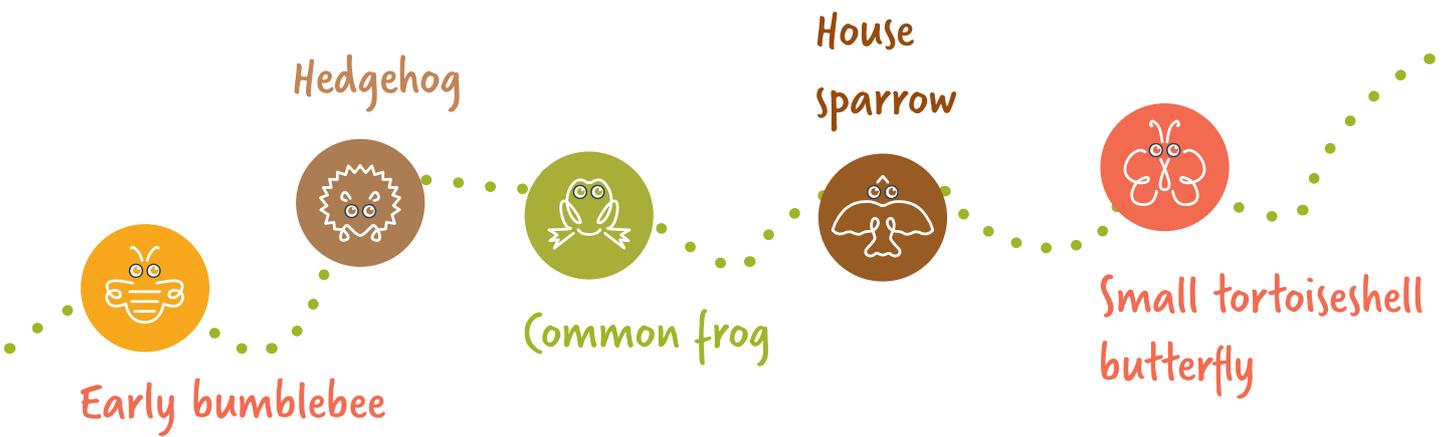
- Caterpillars have a black head throughout the process.
- The body starts as a pale green in the first instar.
- It later segments, with alternate black and greeny-yellow stripes and obvious bristles.
- By the fifth instar, the caterpillars have black forelegs and green hind legs (called pro legs).



# Naturehood



Want to find out more about other species that need your help? (Check out our Naturehood spotter's guide series.)



<https://naturehood.uk>

Illustrations supplied by Chris Shields