

Common Caterpillars

A series of ID guides to help you discover more of Leicestershire's wonderful wildlife

Butterflies, moths and sawflies all have larvae that we call caterpillars. Hatched from an egg, they are feeding machines, gathering the resources needed to transform into the adult insect. Most caterpillars are fussy eaters and are found on one, or a small group of related plants. It therefore helps to recognise the plant species. A few caterpillars over-winter but the majority complete their development into a pupae during a single season. The breeding success of many birds depends on caterpillar availability. *When viewing online, simply click on the species name to find out more.*



Small Tortoiseshell – *Aglais urticae*

ID: All black when small, developing yellow sides. Prickle-like hairs. In groups.

Where: On Stinging Nettles. May-Aug.

Similar: [Peacock](#) (black with white dots. 'Prickly')



Large White – *Pieris brassicae*

ID: To 50mm. Yellow with black spots.

Where: Crucifers (cabbage family), Nasturtium. Apr-July.

Similar: None.



Cinnabar Moth – *Tyria jacobaeae*

ID: To 30mm. Striking black and orange stripes. The striking colours are a warning to predators that they are toxic.

Where: Ragwort. June-Sept.

Similar: None.



Elephant Hawkmoth – *Deilephila elpenor*

ID: To 65mm. Brown/grey (sometimes green) with black spots + 2 pairs of eye-spots. Can extend front segments to look like a 'trunk'.

Where: Willowherbs, Fuschias. July-Oct.

Similar: None.

Become a citizen scientist! If you can spot any of these species, why not submit your sighting at www.naturespot.org.uk and contribute to our scientific knowledge of local wildlife. Record data submitted by the public is vital to conservation. Simply register online then follow the guidance on the Submit Records page.

Other Leicestershire xx to check out:

[Peacock](#), [Comma](#), [Horse Chestnut Leaf-miner](#), [Grey Dagger](#), [Large Rose Sawfly](#)



The Drinker – *Euthrix potatoria*

ID: To 60cm. Blue-grey with yellow stripes and black markings.

Where: Feeds on grasses and reeds but mainly encountered crossing paths from July.

Similar: None.



The Vapourer - *Orgyia antiqua*

ID: To 25mm. Red/black with white tufts. Y shaped front due to hairy legs held forward.

Where: Varied trees and shrubs. May-Sept.

Similar: None.



Puss Moth – *Cerura vinula*

ID: Green with brown saddle. Flat 'face'. Two long 'tails'. Rears up and waves its tails when disturbed.

Where: Aspen, willows, poplars. June-Aug.

Similar: None.



Mullein Moth – *Curculia verbasci*

ID: To 40mm. White with yellow and black spots.

Where: Mullein, sometimes Buddleia. June-Sept.

Similar: None on the host plants.



Zig-zag Sawfly – *Aproceros leucopoda*

ID: The caterpillars are tiny and unremarkable but the zig zag feeding trail on Elm leaves is unmistakable.

Where: Elm leaves. July-Sept. Arrived in the UK in 2017.

Similar: None on Elm with this feeding pattern.



Solomon's Seal Sawfly - *Phymatocera aterrima*

ID: White with darker tubercles. Black head.

Where: Solomon's Seal leaves. July-August.

Similar: None on the host plant.

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