



# BUTTERFLIES GO FREE

## Beauty is more than scale deep

The patterns and colours on a butterfly's wings are primarily a means of communicating. They are a way for the insect to stand out and be recognized, with the ultimate goal of reproducing. Sometimes, though, the message gets intercepted by others along the way.

### Clever camouflage

With their bright, showy colours, male butterflies are certainly attractive to females – and to predators, as well. To get around the problem, some species have patterns and colours on the underside of their wings that offer excellent camouflage. They simply fold their wings over their bodies and blend into the background. Then there are blue morphos – in flight, the iridescent and dull sides of their wings alternate, making them extremely difficult to spot and follow, even for a keen-eyed predator. Some moths have bare patches on their wings that let light through and change the insect's familiar shape. This fools potential predators when light is low.

### Sending signals in the mating game

Each species has its own colourful wing pattern, making it easy for members of the species to recognize each other quickly. A female judges a potential suitor's health by looking at how bright and flamboyant his wing colours are. Females may be less showy, but they also sport unique visual features. A male will approach anything that looks promising to see whether it is actually a female of his species.

Some butterflies have odour-producing scales called andraconia on their wings or bodies. These scales secrete pheromones unique to each species that play a key role in reproduction.