# Gordon Henshall – Lepidoptera Photographer

*Growing up as a young boy on a farm, I spent many hours wandering the Cheshire/Lancashire countryside observing wildlife, in particular butterflies and moths were my favourites. I remember walking through grassy fields where many six-spotted burnet moths were feeding. These would fly into the air as I walked and their spots turned into a sea of red colour. Eventually, I left this life to be educated and work for a living. Now I'm back once again walking the fields and studying wildlife, but not in my shorts anymore and now wearing glasses to see, and taking photographs of butterflies and moths!*

Nearly all the photographs were taken with a Fuji FinePix SL100, 16 Megapixels, using the Super Macro facility. I expect it's not the best, and I'm not the best photographer, but I'm happy with the results. I am a member of Butterfly Conservation, and the following notes on various species are taken from British Butterflies by David Tomlinson and Bob Still.

**Brimstone (male)**

The UK has about 60 species of butterflies, which are insects of the order Lepidoptera, meaning scaled wings. Most are aware of the larger butterflies such as the Brimstone, this being the first to appear in the year. The wingspan of a Brimstone butterfly is large, about 65 - 75mm.

**Common Blue (Male) - Feeding**

The Lycaenidae family contains blue butterflies, which can be used to look at the life cycle of the butterfly. After emerging from the pupa (or chrysalis), the adult expands its wings to be strong enough for flight to find food. It does this using its proboscis (its mouth), which is a hollow coiled tube through which the butterfly feeds and can be uncoiled enabling a butterfly to reach deep into a flower for nectar, as shown for the Common Blue (wing span of 29 – 36mm).

**Holly Blue (Female) - Antennae & Eyes**

Once fed, the butterfly, where life for some is short (4-5 days), moves off to mate and reproduce. Butterflies produce scents (pheromones), which are detected by their sense organs, the antennae, which protrude from the head and are used for smell and balance, as on the Holly Blue butterfly.

Butterflies have quite large eyes, which discern colour and are particularly good at sensing movement. In most species, the wing patterns of males and females are significantly different to allow them to recognise one another.

**Silver-studded Blue (Male & Female) - Mating**

When an unmated female is discovered there follows a complex courtship. The act of mating for the Silver-studded Blue lasts about 30 minutes. During that time a packet of sperm is transferred from the male to the female's body, usually sufficient to fertilise every egg that is laid. Many males also transfer a 'nuptial gift' of soluble food alongside the sperm sac.

**Holly Blue (Female) - Egg Laying**

The females of most species take enormous care during egg-laying, placing their offspring in situations where they are best adapted to survive. The Holly Blue in the photo is laying eggs on its food plant near the buds, which allows the emerging caterpillars to eat the buds when they are developing. The Holly Blue egg is 0.4mm in size, which make them very hard to see.

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### Adonis Blue (Male) - Relationship with Ants

Like most blues, the Adonis Blue life cycle is closely linked to that of certain species of ant. The Large Blue, in particular, is unable to survive without a particular species of red ant (Myrmica sabuleti) that takes the caterpillars into its nests. The Large Blue became extinct as a native butterfly in 1979. However, with the scientific knowledge gained above it has since been re-introduced to a number of sites where careful management of the habit has ensured its survival.

### Painted Lady Butterfly

I was really surprised when I started to take pictures with my mobile phone camera facility (a Moto E with 5 Megapixels). The photo of the Painted Lady, which is a long distance migrant from North Africa, is a prime example of what can be achieved.

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### And Why not Moths?

If butterflies don’t interest you then maybe you might try moths, since there are thousands in the UK, compared with only tens of butterflies. Many of the moths only fly at night, which is another dimension for a photographer. Like butterflies, moths and their caterpillars also have defence mechanisms or markings to deter predators.

The **Elephant Head Hawk moth caterpillar** is shown in snake pose. The caterpillar, which feeds on fuchsias, will draw in its trunk when threatened to produce large ‘eye’ markings at the head end. The Elephant Hawk moth is quite large (70mm long, about the same size as a Brimstone butterfly) and is often thought to be a pink butterfly.

The **Magpie moth** has a yellow band with black spots, which mimics the caterpillar and even spiders hate the taste of them.

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### A Different Species to Photograph: Dragonflies & Damselflies

These I know nothing about, although they are quite spectacular to photograph.  These shots were taken with my mobile phone camera.