

Butterfly Life Cycle

Butterflies have a complete life cycle with four separate stages.



What happens during the first stage?

During the first stage of the butterfly life cycle, the female butterfly lays her eggs, most often onto a leaf. The new butterfly starts life as a very small egg. They can be round, oval or cylindrical and some are ribbed.



What happens during the second stage?

During the second stage, a caterpillar (or larva) hatches. It is the long, worm-like stage of the butterfly life cycle. Most caterpillars have patterns, stripes or patches and sometimes spine-like hairs. In this stage, the caterpillar needs to eat lots to grow. As it gets bigger, it sheds its skin four or more times.



What happens during the third stage?

During the third stage, the caterpillar forms a chrysalis (or pupa) which is usually brown or green so it is camouflaged. This is the transformation stage, when it starts to grow wings.



What happens during the fourth stage?

The caterpillar changes into a colourful adult butterfly. When it first emerges, its wings are soft and folded against its body because it had to fit inside the pupa. The butterfly rests and then blood pumps into its wings and they start working and flapping. The butterfly usually learns to fly in 3 or 4 hours. The adults also mate and the female butterflies lay eggs, beginning the life cycle again.