

EMPEROR'S BUTTERFLIES AND MOTHS

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An emperor was the biggest, baddest ruler of them all—the leader of undisputed power who controlled a nation, or more usually, a number of subjugated nations known collectively as an empire. Nowadays, the notion of an all-conquering larger-than-life figure lives on in the way we give the prefix emperor to particularly magnificent specimens of living things: the Emperor Butterfly, Emperor Moth. Emperor butterflies comprise some of the largest most beautiful butterflies. They are large, brightly colored, fast flying, and enjoy a good drink.

Morpho peleides, the Peleides Blue Morpho, Common Morpho, or the **Emperor** is an iridescent tropical butterfly found in Mexico, Central America, northern South America, Paraguay, and Trinidad. The brilliant blue color in the butterfly's wings is caused by the diffraction of the light from thousands of tiny scales on its wings.

It uses this to frighten away predators, by flashing its wings rapidly. Pilots flying over the rain forest can occasionally see brief flashes of blue as these butterflies travel above the forest canopy. The wingspan of the Emperor butterfly ranges from 7.5–20 cm. The Emperor is an uncommon butterfly that is found around flowers late in the day in the summer months. It is the only butterfly that can be found in the night.



Papilio ulysses (imperf)
Australia, 1983, Sc#875

Papilio ulysses, the Ulysses butterfly, also commonly known as the **Blue Emperor**, is a large swallowtail butterfly of Australia, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands with wingspan of about 14 cm. The upper side of the wings are an iridescent electric blue; the underside is a more subdued black and brown.

The colors are produced by the microscopic structure of the scales, a phenomenon called structural coloration. When the butterfly is perched, the intense blue of its wings is hidden by the plainer brown underside of its wings, helping it to blend in with its surroundings. When in flight, the butterfly can be seen hundreds of meters away as sudden bright blue flashes. This butterfly is used as an emblem for tourism in Queensland, Australia.

Papilio ophidicephalus, known as the **Emperor Swallowtail**, is a large, colorful butterfly with a wingspan up to 120 mm. It is found in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is an impressive black swallowtail with a distinctive pattern of pale yellow marginal spots and bands on both the forewings and hindwings. The hindwings are notable for the especially long tails, and blue and red eyespots.



Sasakia charonda
Japan, 1956, Sc#622
w/ color-missing error

Butterfly Omurasaki (*Sasakia charonda*) is one of some species of butterflies commonly known as the **Japanese Emperor**. The butterfly has a beautiful purple wings with yellow, white, and red spots that stand out in the natural green.

With a wingspan of 9–12 cm, the butterfly is a big member of the family Nymphalidae, which is grouping of butterflies with large sizes that are visible during the warm months all across Japan.

It is a powerful flier thanks to its robust body. Its strong wing beat can be heard from some meters away. The Japanese Emperor was designated as the “National Butterfly of Japan” by Entomological Society of Japan in 1956, because the butterfly lives throughout the country.



Morpho peleides
Grenada-Grenadines,
1975, Sc#75



Papilio ophidicephalus
Zambia, 1997, Sc#682

The **Purple Emperor** (*Apatura iris*), as the male butterfly is affectionately known, is a magnificent and elusive butterfly with a wingspan up to 90 mm that is actively sought out by the many collectors. It is widely distributed in dense, broadleaved woodlands throughout Central Europe, and in suitably temperate parts of Asia, including central and western China.

This butterfly spends most of its time in the woodland canopy where it feeds on aphid honeydew, with the occasional encounter when it comes close to the ground to feed on sap runs or, in the case of the male, animal droppings, carrion, or moist ground that provide much-needed salts and minerals.

The male butterfly is one of the most beautiful of all of the butterflies found in Europe. From certain angles it appears to have black wings intersected with white bands. However, when the wings are at a certain angle to the sun, they display the most beautiful purple sheen, a result of light being refracted from the structures of the wing scales. The female, on the other hand, is a deep brown and does not possess the purple sheen found in the male.

The beautiful blue *Charaxes imperialis* butterfly is commonly known as the **Imperial Blue Charaxes**. It is widely distributed from Guinea-Bissau through much of the equatorial forest to Uganda, Rwanda, and northwestern Zambia. The habitat mainly seems to be drier forest systems and it is often absent from true evergreen forest. This butterfly is widely distributed in no fewer than nine subspecies. It has a wingspan of 85–100 mm. This butterfly needs a forest environment of reasonable condition and so may be threatened by deforestation and degradation of its habitat.



Apatura iris
Hungary, 1959, Sc#1271 w/ printing freak



Charaxes jasius
Italy, 1960
(unissued design artwork)

Charaxes jasius, the Two-tailed Pasha or **Foxy Emperor**, is another butterfly in the family Nymphalidae. This species occurs in the Mediterranean region and Africa. *Charaxes jasius* is a medium-to-large butterfly with a wingspan reaching 65–75 mm in males and 75–90 mm in females.

The upper sides of the wings are dark brown with orange margins. The hindwings have two short tails, characteristic of most species of this genus. The underside of the wings is reddish-brown with numerous darker bands edged with white or gray. The adults prefer ripe fruits, of which they suck the sugary liquids and these butterflies are by no means shy of humans. It is possible to bait these butterflies with sweet fruit or liquor.

The **Orange Emperor** butterfly (*Charaxes latona*) is a fast-flying and conspicuous insect with a wingspan up to 8 cm. It is native to the tropical rainforests of eastern Indonesia, western Melanesia, and far northern Queensland, Australia. They fly all year and may complete several generations annually.

Males are territorial and occupy perches some six meters up in forest trees, while females frequent forest edges and clearings. The adult butterflies are brown with a submarginal band of black spots, which are wide at the forewing tip and narrow at the hindwing tornus. Underneath, they are orange with thin wavy black lines. The males have a lilac tinge underneath. Adults are attracted to sap flows and are said to be attracted to fermenting fruit baits.



Charaxes imperialis
Congo D.R., 2002, N/A



Charaxes latona
Antigua & Barbuda, 2003,
Sc#2712c

Looking at the butterfly *Teinopalpus imperialis* it is easy to understand why it is called **The Emperor of India**. With its shimmering greens, bright yellows and delicate blacks, this rare butterfly is a visual delight. This magnificent butterfly is found from Nepal and northern India east to northern Vietnam. In these areas, it occurs at

medium and higher elevations from 6,000 to 10,000 feet in well-wooded terrain. It has a strong and fast flight. Although the butterfly is protected under Indian law, it is hunted for sale to butterfly collectors.



Saturnia pavonia
Ireland, 1994, Sc#933

Saturnia is a genus of moths in the family Saturniidae. They are large moths, commonly called Emperor moths. The adult **Emperor Moth** (*Saturnia pavonia*) is a truly spectacular insect. On the wing between April and June, the male of this large, day-flying moth species is a particularly striking sight, and can easily be mistaken for a butterfly due to its bright colors.

The heavily scaled wings of the Emperor Moth, which occurs in temperate regions of Europe and Asia, are marked by transparent eyespots, which presumably serve a protective function in frightening predators. It is a fairly widespread species, one that favors open scrub habitat on heath land, moorland, fens, along field margins and hedgerows, woodland rides and sand dunes.

This is a large moth, with females reaching a wingspan about 80 mm and the males a wingspan of about 60 mm. For the few months that they are on the wing, adult Emperor Moths do not feed at all. Their sole purpose is to find a mate and reproduce.



Saturnia pyri
Austria, 1995, postal card

This species starts to emerge after the onset of cool and misty autumn nights. Adults are on wing from late September to early November. Both sexes remain active down to temperatures of 2° C, and will even tolerate mild frosts.

Butterflies and moths are the most beautiful creations of nature, the top of its artistic mastery, undoubted masterpieces of evolution. The hundreds of different species of butterflies and moths surprise us with their beauty and a creative peak of perfection. There are many fascinating and unusual species among butterflies and moths, which are the adornment of nature, have great scientific and cognitive significance, and bring real joy and boundless aesthetic delight.

The Author is ready to help for philatelists in creating of philatelic exhibits on butterflies and moths. His address: Vladimir Kachan, street Kulibina 9-49, Minsk-52, BY-220052, Republic of Belarus
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Teinopalpus imperialis
Nepal, 2006, Sc#774
(essay)

Saturnia pyri, the Giant Peacock Moth, also called **Giant Emperor Moth**, or **Viennese Emperor**, is a Saturniid moth that is native to Europe. It is the largest European moth, with a wingspan reaching 15–20 cm. Males of this species, with feathery antennae, can perceive the pheromones of a female at a distance of eight kilometers.

The **Autumn Emperor Moth** (*Perisomena caecigena*) is a moth from southwestern Europe with wingspan up to 90 mm. Females are reddish-brown to pale wine-red with some yellowish markings. The males are pale sandy yellow to deep yellow with reddish markings along the postmedial bands. The males bear exceptionally large, pectinate antennae.



Perisomena caecigena
Bulgaria, 1968, Sc#1705