



THE INCREDIBLE MIGRATION OF THE PAINTED LADY

The painted lady, *Vanessa cardui*, is an almost cosmopolitan species of butterfly. It completes a journey of more than 10,000 km between Africa and Europe every year, through a succession of generations, looking for optimal breeding conditions at any moment.

LIFE CYCLE

The complete cycle, which consists of egg, larval, pupal and adult stages, lasts 1-2 months and takes place, without interruption, 6-8 times over the year. Adults live for 3-4 weeks.



WORLDWIDE DISTRIBUTION

JUNE

5 Great Britain, Dorset

The generation that are born in the Mediterranean region migrate to northern Europe in early summer. After their long journey, butterflies feed avidly on the nectar of flowers to recharge themselves.



Thistles also constitute a favourite nectar source of painted ladies.

APRIL-MAY

4 Catalonia, Barcelona

Migratory painted ladies mate as soon as they reach their destination areas, with males establishing their territories on mountain ridges and hill tops.

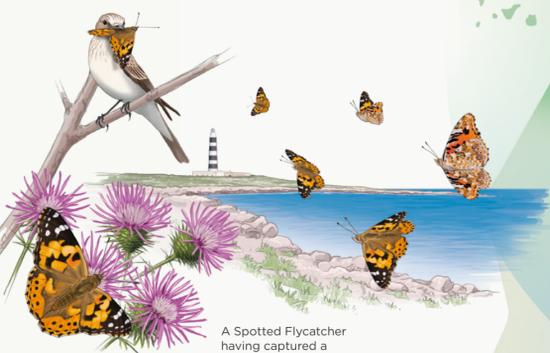


Acrobatic flight of two males fighting for a territory. This kind of behaviour is only seen in the late afternoon.

APRIL-MAY

3 Menorca, Illa de l'Aire

Painted ladies fly hundreds of miles and have to overcome major obstacles during their migration. They fly over the Mediterranean Sea to Europe in the spring.



A Spotted Flycatcher having captured a painted lady.

APRIL

2 Morocco, Settat

The Maghreb provides the main emergency area for painted ladies in the western Palearctic during the spring, thanks to its high density of thistles and mallows.



A larval nest and caterpillar on mallow, and several adults emerging from chrysalises.



A Bee-eater preying on a painted lady.



The wasp *Cotesia vanessae* parasitizing an early instar caterpillar.

NATURAL ENEMIES

Painted ladies have numerous predators that take advantage of them as a temporary and occasionally abundant resource: birds, such as the bee-eater and the spotted flycatcher, and even frogs, in the Maghreb. Many painted ladies are also killed at the caterpillar stage, when parasitised by the *Cotesia vanessae* wasp.



Frogs are common predators of painted ladies in the African oases during the autumn.

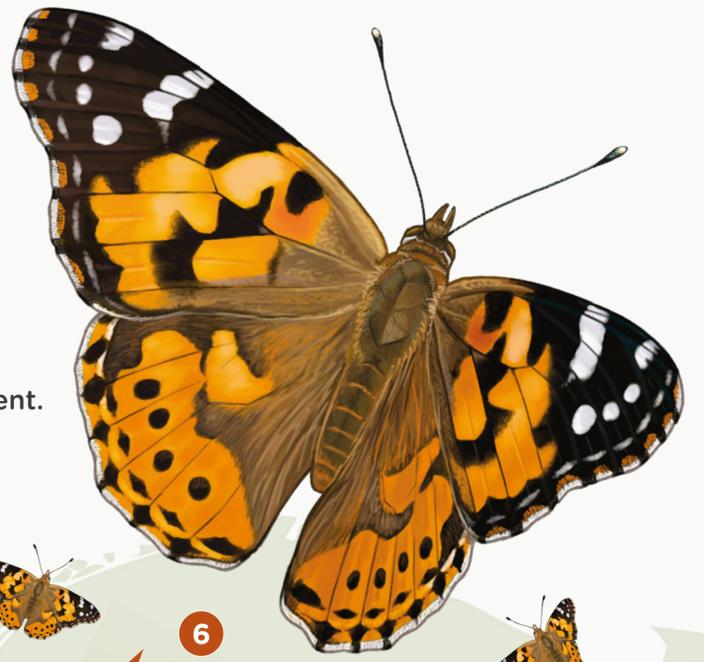
DECEMBER

1 Subtropical Africa

During the winter, most of the population is concentrated in subtropical Africa, from where it recolonises the Maghreb each year and starts its annual progression to the north.



Female egg-laying on a host plant.



JULY

6 Sweden, Arctic tundra

Painted ladies may reach the extremities of their migratory circuit, such as northern Scandinavia, when environmental conditions so permit.



After their long migrations, many butterflies arrive having lost their bright colours and with broken wings.

AUGUST-SEPTEMBER

7 Baltic, Gulf of Finland

At the end of the summer, the generation that are born in northern Europe travel to the Maghreb and the Sahel, taking advantage of high altitude tailwinds.



Painted ladies are very attracted to dates, which provide a valuable source of sugar.

OCTOBER

8 Morocco, Zagora

Huge numbers concentrate in the oases of the Maghreb desert during the autumn, where they can find nectar sources and host plants where to lay their eggs on.

MAY - SEPTEMBER

MARCH - JUNE / AUGUST - OCTOBER

FEBRUARY - MAY / OCTOBER - DECEMBER

OCTOBER - FEBRUARY