

7. Butterflies

I think it's safe to say that everyone loves butterflies. However, most of us may not realize how fascinating and important they really are. They are more than just an insect that's fun to watch and photograph. They are also very important.

First of all, butterflies are *pollinators*. Secondly, they are *indicator species*, meaning that their presence in an area usually signifies a good, healthy habitat. Finally, they are a part of a food chain, particularly in their larval stages. It is said that aside from bees, butterflies are the most important insect in your yard.

There are about 20,000 different species of butterflies. It may surprise you to learn that butterflies are *cold-blooded*. They rely on the sun to raise their body temperature. If the air temperature falls below 55 degrees, a butterfly is unable to fly, making them unable to feed and flee from predators.

Because butterflies are unable to tolerate cold temperatures, the butterflies which are found in colder climates migrate south or west to warmer climates when the weather turns colder. Some butterflies will travel as many as 2500 miles each year!

The main threat to butterflies is habitat destruction. Drainage of wetlands, growth of cities, expansion of agriculture and use of pesticides have taken a toll on butterfly populations. Herbicides also can impact butterfly populations, as certain weeds, such as milkweed, are essential to a butterfly's survival.

Did you know that a group of butterflies is called a kaleidoscope?

I think butterflies are beautiful to photograph, and learning about the life of a butterfly is surely fascinating!