

Insect Fact Sheet

The Painted Lady



The Painted Lady butterfly is one of our most familiar migrant insects. Each year, Painted Ladies arrive into the UK in varying numbers, but occasionally these numbers can be of massive proportions. The last big invasion came in 2009, when an estimated 10 to 15 million Painted Ladies arrived here.

The Painted Lady has a global distribution and is a strong flyer, capable of covering around 100 miles a day, averaging 30 miles per hour.

Adult Painted Ladies cannot survive our Winter climate, preferring the milder conditions of southern Europe and north Africa. Early in the year, they start breeding, but begin to move northwards through Spain and France as the Summer heat dries up the caterpillar's foodplant. Females stop to lay eggs as they continue their journey, leaving a succession of developing broods behind them.

The 2009 invasion was predicted weeks in advance of the event, when thousands of Painted Lady pupae were found in fields around the Atlas Mountains in Morocco. In early April, large numbers of Painted Ladies started to move through southern Spain, reaching the UK by late April and early May.

Their progress north across the country continued during May, but the even larger numbers expected returning south during the late Summer, never materialised.

Insect migration is one of nature's most amazing feats, especially the long distances covered by the Painted Lady and the Red Admiral.

So next Autumn, watch that Painted Lady that hurries past you. Quite likely, it is heading for a far off land to survive the Winter.

Such is the wonder of migration!

