

# Courtship & Egglaying

BUTTERFLIES



The most important events in the lives of butterflies are mating and laying eggs. The striking colors and shapes of many species are thought to attract the opposite sex. In addition, most butterflies have complicated courtship behaviors that attract their mates as well. Some butterflies perform elaborate courtship flights and "dances". The male butterflies also emit chemicals called pheromones to attract members of the opposite sex. When a male finds a female who shows an interest in him they both land, and the female holds her wings in a partly open position so that the male can land easily alongside her and continue spreading his scent. The mating pair will often touch each other with their antennae, detecting other scents which stimulate activity at close range. Mating may last from twenty minutes to several hours, during which time the two insects normally do not move, but if they are disturbed the two might fly off still joined together. We have found that the perfume under the name brand "Charlie" contains a number of chemical compounds that mimic butterfly pheromones.

## Butterflies Mating

**1** Like this pair of Sweet Oil butterflies, *Mechanitis polymnia*, most butterflies mate on a plant. They can fly while linked together, but they avoid this unless disturbed so as not to call attention to themselves. After mating, males look for other females, but the females look for their particular species of host plant to lay their eggs. Some butterflies, notably those with grass-feeding larvae, scatter their eggs, but most females actively look for a host plant so that their offspring will have easy access to a food supply during their larval stage.



## Egg Laying

**2** After selecting a potential host plant for their eggs, the females land on a leaf and walk around it, testing and sensing the plant to make sure it belongs to the correct plant species that her caterpillars need as a food supply. This Pierid butterfly from Central America, *Perrhybris pyrra*, is laying its eggs on the upper surface of the leaf. She is very vulnerable to predators or any other disturbance during this time.

## About to Hatch

**3** These eggs from the Blue Mormon butterfly, *Papilio polymnesor*, have darkened and are about to hatch. Soon tiny caterpillars will emerge. A Blue Mormon lays its eggs in a random pattern rather than cluster, so there is more chance that predatory bugs will overlook some of them.

