Butterfly and moth facts

• Nearly 70 per cent of Australia’s 385 butterfly species are found in the rainforests of the Wet Tropics.

• The Hercules Moth (or Atlas Moth) of north Queensland is the world’s largest moth, reaching a wing-span of about 25 cm. It is a velvety brown colour.

• The Hercules Moths cannot feed because they don’t have a proboscis (the long thin tube on the front of their heads) and therefore can’t suck up food. Their caterpillars feed on the leaves of the Bleeding Heart Tree.

• Giant Wood Moths are the heaviest moths in the world, weighing over 30g.

• Butterflies and moths are still able to fly if their scales are removed. They are just less colourful!

• Some moths taste terrible, and advertise this fact with a warning of bright colours on their bodies and wings. After dark, however, when this visual signal is useless, they emit ultrasonic clicks which can be picked up by insectivorous bats. These clicks warn the bats that the moths are unpleasant to eat, and also jams the bats’ sonar system.

• Certain moths can detect a 15-watt ultraviolet lamp from a distance of 250m. Nocturnal moths become active when it gets dark.

• Some plants catch butterflies. They can become snared on the sticky leaves of the insectivorous Sundew. The flowers of the Rubber Vine weed trap the legs or proboscis of butterflies as they search for nectar. They are unable to escape, and eventually die.

• Ulysses Butterflies are attracted to red, and often settle on red flowers or land on red cars.

• Blue Triangle Butterflies which fly around rainforest creeks, are attracted to blue, and often land on blue clothing.

• The Black and White Tit Butterfly is a pest of orchids. It lays its eggs on the flower buds and the caterpillars eat the flowers.
• The **Evening Brown Butterfly** is a common open forest butterfly of the Wet Tropics. It changes its **colours** in winter and summer to camouflage itself against the background of the vegetation. These well-camouflaged butterflies rest quietly on leaf litter during the day, and wait until evening to fly.

• Caterpillars are **feeding machines**. In just two weeks they can grow to **3000 times** their original size. This would be like a **human** ballooning to the size of an **elephant**!

• **White Nymph** caterpillars feed in clusters on stinging trees.

• Some caterpillars can detect light through their skin.

• The caterpillars of the **Hawk Moth** and several other types of moths can **change their colour**. If they live alone, they are pale, but become dark if they live in dense populations. The colour is controlled by their hormones so that they’re **camouflaged** in their environment and are less obvious to their predators.

• **Hairs and spikes** on a caterpillar are a warning to **stay away**! They can cause painful and itchy irritations and some of the spiky caterpillars inject a very nasty poison. **Look, but don’t touch any caterpillars.**

---

These fact sheets are based on the Tropical Topics newsletters edited by Stella Martin and produced by the Wet Tropics Management Authority and the Queensland Environmental Protection Agency.