

Brown Argus and Common Blue

Identification guide



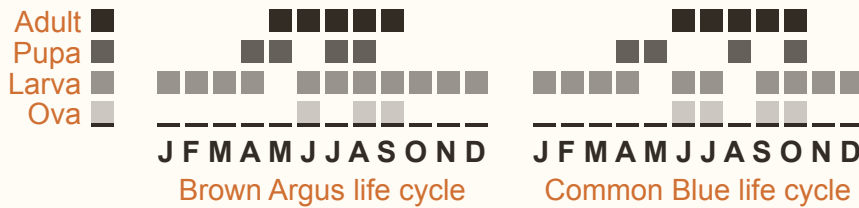
A male Brown Argus Basking - Photography © Steven Cheshire 2009

Brown Argus or female Common Blue?

This identification guide aims to provide a reliable means of comparing and accurately identifying the differences between the female Common Blue (*Polyommatus icarus*) and the Brown Argus (*Aricia agestis*) butterfly.



Both species may be seen in large numbers in the right habitat but more often only a few individuals may be observed. Both the Common Blue and Brown Argus may be encountered together. Their peak flight times are May/June and August.

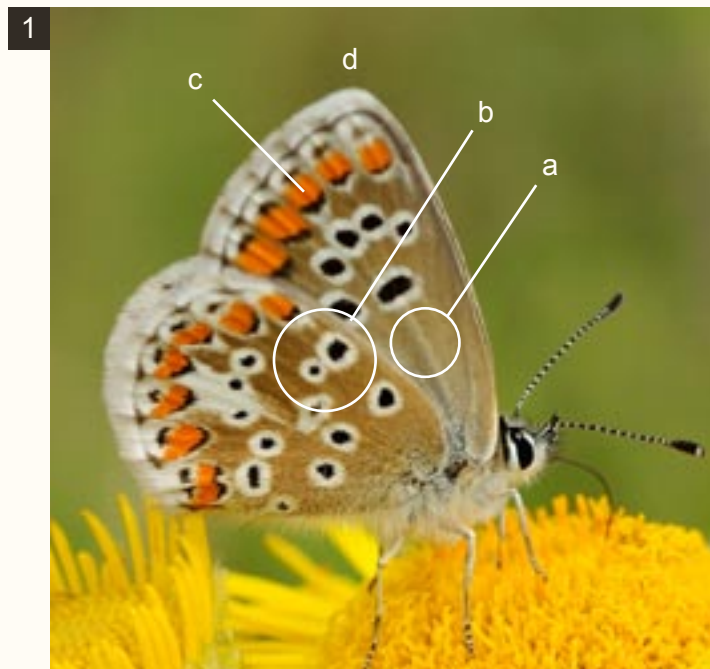


Brown Argus (female) feeding on Fleabane

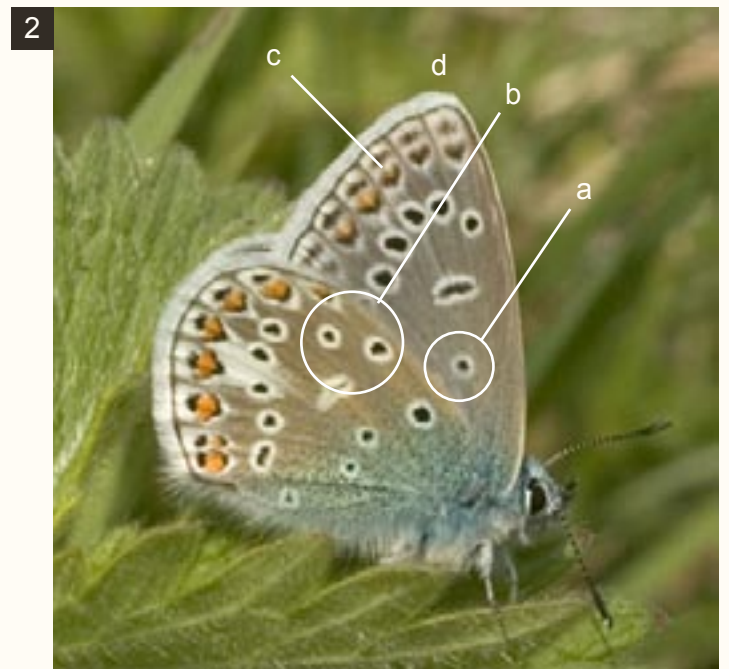
Spot the difference...

Its a conversation which I have had on numerous occasions with many different people. How do you tell the difference between a female Common Blue and a Brown Argus.

Take a look at image (1) below of a Brown Argus and compare this to a Common Blue (2). The absence of a black spot (a) on the underside of the forewing known as the 'cell spot' would suggest that the individual is a Brown Argus. This in combination with the vertical alignment of two black spots (b) makes the identification almost certain. To be sure, you should also assess the orange lunules (c) which tend to be larger, brighter orange and more strongly defined than in a Common Blue. Note that the apex of the forewing of the Common Blue is less rounded than in the Brown Argus (d).



Brown Argus



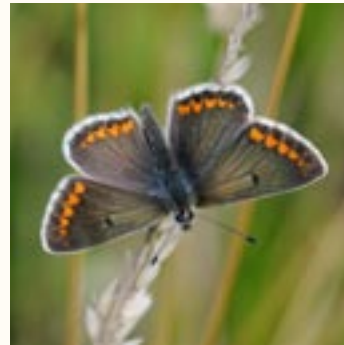
Common Blue

Brown Argus

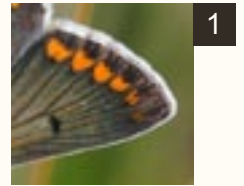
When the Brown Argus is basking, it almost always settles facing head downwards with its wings open, tilted towards the sun in order to absorb as much heat as possible as shown in the two main images right.

There are three features which will enable you to identify the sex of a Brown Argus. The first is the extent of the orange lunes on the forewings. On the male, the lunes fade out before the tips of the wings (1), in the female, they remain well defined (3). The tip of the male abdomen extends beyond the white fringe of the hindwings (2), in the female the abdomen is shorter and fatter (4). Finally, males sometimes have a slight bluish tinge to the base of the wings at the point where they join the thorax. Depending upon the angle of light, males in particular may display a blue, purple or even greenish iridescence on the upperside of the wings.

As a general rule, the Brown Argus is slightly smaller than the Common Blue and in flight tends to have a more silvery appearance due to the reflection of light off the upper wing surface although this is less pronounced in older individuals whose wings are worn.



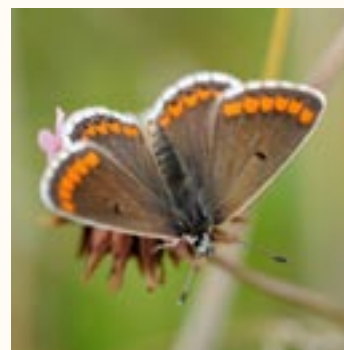
Brown Argus (male)



1



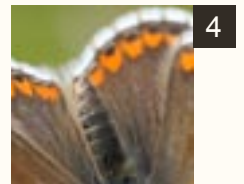
2



Brown Argus (female)



3



4

Common Blue

The male Common Blue is easy to identify having completely blue upper wings and a blue body (5). When viewed a certain angles, you can often see the spots of the underside through the wings (6).

The female is however quite variable and can be almost completely blue (7) to completely brown (9) and it is this which can lead to miss-identification although the majority of females are brown with small amounts of blue (8). The orange lunes are always present and are usually clearly defined on the hindwings (10), but are less well defined on the forewings (11).



Common Blue (male)



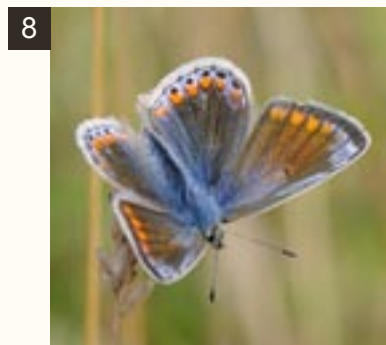
5



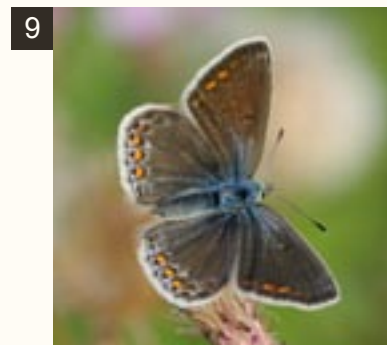
6



Common Blue (female)



Common Blue (female)



Common Blue (female)



10



11

Remember... all is not what it seems...

It should be noted that caution is needed when identifying Common Blue and Brown Argus, especially anyone who has limited experience of the two species in the wild. Aberrant forms do occur and some of these may make a positive identification even more tricky.

The image shown right is of a male Common Blue, which not only lacks the forewing cell spot but also the spots on the hindwing are poorly defined or completely absent. This is a known aberrant form named ab. *semipersica*.



Common Blue ab. *semipersica* (male)

Find out more

If you would like to find out more about the Brown Argus and Common Blue, visit the following web links:

<http://www.warwickshire-butterflies.org.uk>

<http://www.butterfly-conservation.org>

<http://www.britishbutterflies.co.uk>

<http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk>

Brown Argus Links

<http://www.britishbutterflies.co.uk/asp/species.asp?vernacular=Brown+Argus>

http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/species.php?vernacular_name=Brown+Argus

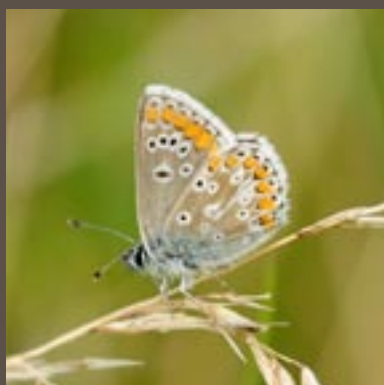
Common Blue Links

<http://www.britishbutterflies.co.uk/asp/species.asp?vernacular=Common+Blue>

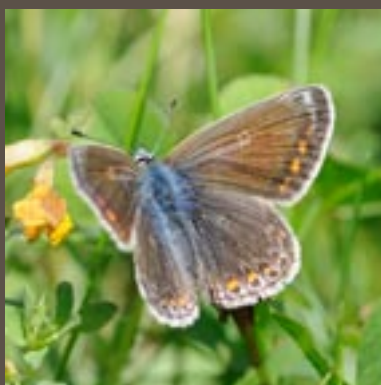
http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/species.php?vernacular_name=Common+Blue

Test your new identification skills

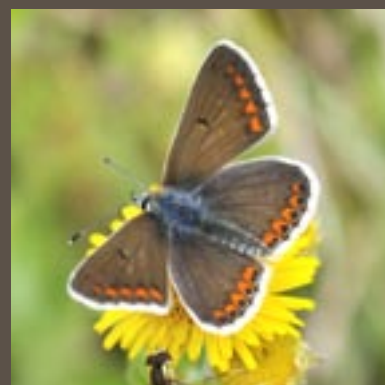
Now can you tell the difference? There are 3 images below, see if you can identify them. Answers can be found online at www.britishbutterflies.co.uk/downloads.asp



1 Is this an underside view of a
 (a) Brown Argus or
 (b) Common Blue



2 Is this the upperside view of a
 (a) female Brown Argus or
 (b) female Common Blue



3 Is this the upperside view of a
 (a) female Brown Argus or
 (b) female Common Blue

Photograph © Debbie Hibbitt 2009

This free information sheet is available to download from: www.britishbutterflies.co.uk/downloads.asp