

# BIODIVERSITY on your Farm

Species Profile # 7

The National Biodiversity Data Centre has set a challenge for farmers to record some of the amazing biodiversity found on your farm during the year. We have 40 species for you to record.

Are you up for the challenge?

## Species: Holly Blue Butterfly

Scientific Name: *Celastrina argiolus*

Irish name: Gormán Cuilinn

### Group

1 of 35 butterfly species in Ireland.

Check out our Butterflies of Ireland poster:

<https://biodiversityireland.ie/app/uploads/2021/06/Butterflies-of-Ireland-768x546-1.png>

### How common on farms

Biodiversity surveys were carried out across 40 farms within the National Biodiversity Data Centre's 'Protecting Farmland Pollinators' EIP project (<https://biodiversityireland.ie/projects/protecting-farmland-pollinators/>). The 40 farms were chosen to reflect farms of differing types and intensity levels. Holly Blue butterfly was present on some of the 40 farms.



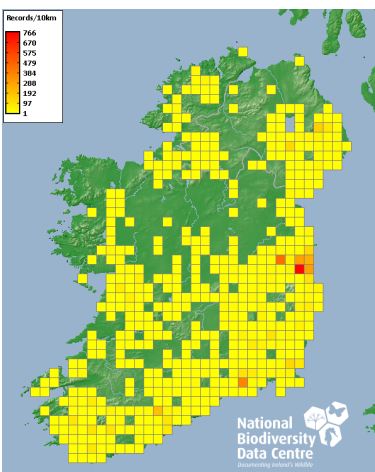
Holly Blue butterfly (female)  
Note: Wings are bright blue. Females have black wing edges.

### Identification Tips

- The Holly Blue is a small sized butterfly species (wingspan: 26-34mm).
- Bright blue colour with an absence of orange spots on the underside of the pale silvery blue wings.
- Typically flies 1.5m along hedgerows/tree lines.
- 1st generation: April to May, 2nd generation: July to September.

### Distribution

Widely distributed in the southern half of the country, less widespread in the northern half.



Source: The Holly Blue records as viewed on Biodiversity Maps, 2023

## Biodiversity Tip No. 7 Encourage Holly and Ivy to grow around the farm:

They are an important caterpillar food plant for the Holly Blue butterfly caterpillar.

They're also a great source of pollen and nectar for pollinators, and in the winter the berries provide valuable food for wildlife.



## Conservation Status

Red Lists are an internationally recognised methodology for assessing conservation status. An Red List of Irish Butterflies was published in 2010. It found that the Holly Blue was not threatened with extinction from the island of Ireland. Based on the Red List, it is 'Least Concern'.

The Irish Butterfly Monitoring Scheme found a 9% increase over the period 2008-2020, a moderate increase.

## Management Tips

*Nectar food for adult Holly Blue :*

- Encourage Bramble, Bugle, Buttercups, Forget-me-nots, Holly, Ivy, Thistle, Water mint.

*Food for Holly Blue caterpillars:*

- Encourage Holly and Ivy around the farm.
- Retain some flowering Ivy, as this is where the eggs of the 2nd brood larvae feed.

*Hedgerow management*

- Plant new hedgerows or restore existing 'gappy' hedgerows.
- Manage hedgerows on a 3-year rotation, aim for your hedge to be at least 2.5m above ground level.
- Check if your hedgerows connect. This will allow pollinators and other wildlife to move safely around your farm.

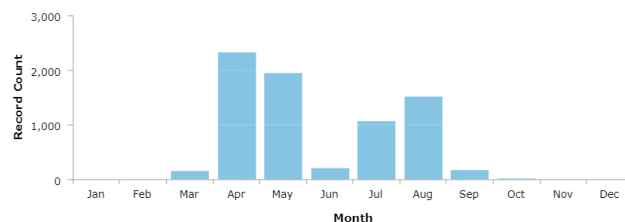


Holly Blues mating.

## When?

A species that usually has 2 generations, the 1st flight is between April and May, the 2nd in flight between July to September. The earliest it has been recorded in Ireland is 28 February (2019).

### Records per month across all datasets



National Biodiversity Data Centre, Ireland, Holly Blue Butterfly, *Celestrina argiolus* image, accessed April 2023,

## Where on the farm?

The adult butterflies tend to hug hedgerows that contain Holly and Ivy, with a sunny aspect.

Also woodland edges, field margins and mature gardens.

The caterpillars develop in the unopened buds of Holly and Ivy.



## Value

- Butterflies contribute to some pollination, as they feed on the nectar of plants.
- Cross-pollination of our wildflowers, helps them to be resilient, and boosts their fruiting ability for the next generation and wildlife.
- Butterflies can be an indicator species, as to the health of our natural environment.

## Further Info

Colonies of Holly Blue are found in hedgerows, woodland edges and mature gardens which support its foodplants.

The principal foodplants are Holly and Ivy. The spring brood feeds principally on Holly and the second brood mainly on Ivy.

Holly Blue flight time and the number of broods will depend on location. They can have 2 or even 3 generations in a year. However, in the north west of Ireland, just 1 brood may sometimes fly and Holly is probably the sole foodplant.

The females lay eggs at the base of base of flower buds on plants growing in sunny warm conditions. The larvae feed on the developing flowers and fruit.

They overwinter as a pupa.

The adults nectar on food plants, especially blackberry bloom and on aphid honeydew which coats the leaves of trees in the summer.

## Similar species

It is similar in colour to the Common Blue butterfly, but Holly Blue lacks orange spots on the underside of their wings.

## Affected by a change in climate?

They may be affected by a change in flowering periods.

## Need some help with identification?

Just drop us a line, we'll be happy to help:

[pollinators@biodiversityireland.ie](mailto:pollinators@biodiversityireland.ie)

## Useful Links

Try this free butterfly identification course:

How to identify Ireland's Butterflies

[https://rise.articulate.com/share/1Pkn\\_siL\\_jhtLZIL97wEWzOy5-k7dtpn#/](https://rise.articulate.com/share/1Pkn_siL_jhtLZIL97wEWzOy5-k7dtpn#/)

You can buy a Butterfly Identification Swatch here:

<https://shop.biodiversityireland.ie/>

## Record here

Your records will help us build a picture of farmland biodiversity in Ireland. If you're happy with your identification, you can submit your record.

- On the National Biodiversity Data Centre website:

<https://records.biodiversityireland.ie/record/biodiversity-on-your-farm#7/53.455/-8.016>

or

- You could also download our free smartphone App for recording in the field

*Android App:*

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=nbdc.mobile.biodiversity>

*Iphone App:*

<https://apps.apple.com/ie/app/biodiversity-data-capture/id906361120>

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