

# — BIODIVERSITY — on your Farm

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: Small Copper Butterfly

Scientific Name: *Lycaena phlaeas*

Irish name: Copróg bheag

### 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. Small Copper butterfly was present on 5 of the 40 farms.



@ Ruth Wilson

Small Copper butterfly.

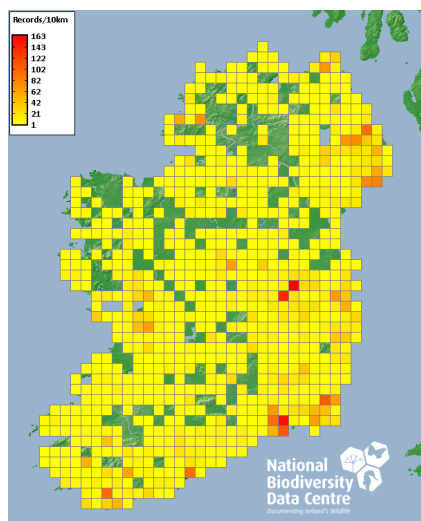
Note: Dark dots on vivid copper coloured upper forewing.  
Broad copper band at margin of hind wing.

### Identification Tips

- A striking, small and fast moving butterfly, they continually move around a flower when feeding.
- 32 to 35mm across the wings.
- Dark dots on vivid copper coloured upper forewing.
- Broad copper band at margin of hindwing.
- Can be spotted basking on open ground.

### Distribution

Widespread, but a general decline in the countryside.



Source: The Small Copper records as viewed on Biodiversity Maps, 2023

## Biodiversity Tip No. 22

Sorrel are an important caterpillar food plant for the Small Copper.

The female lays her eggs on Common sorrel and Broad leaved Dock (neutral soils). On acid soils, the plant used is Sheep's sorrel.



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## Conservation Status

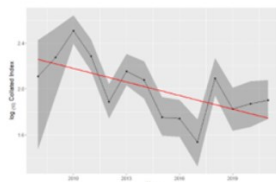
Red Lists are an internationally recognised methodology for assessing conservation status. A Red List of Irish Butterflies was published in 2010. It found that the Small Copper was not threatened with extinction from the island of Ireland. Based on the Red List, it is of 'Least Concern'.

However, the Irish Butterfly Monitoring Scheme found a -69% decrease over the period 2008-2021, a moderate decline [Irish Butterfly Monitoring Scheme - National Biodiversity Data Centre \(biodiversityireland.ie\)](#)

**Small Copper** *Lycaena phlaeas*  
Generations per year: 2  
Overwinters as: Larva  
Conservation status (2010): Least Concern



**Trends**  
Trend 2008 - 2021 - Moderate decline (-69%)  
Trend 2012 - 2021 - Uncertain



National Biodiversity Data Centre, Ireland, Irish Butterfly Monitoring Scheme. Small Copper Butterfly, *Lycaena phlaeas*, [Small Copper \(Lycaena phlaeas\) - Detail - Biodiversity Maps \(biodiversityireland.ie\)](#)

## Management Tips

*Nectar food for adult Small Copper:*

- Encourage Fleabane, Buttercup and Yarrow.

*Food for Small Copper caterpillars:*

- Encourage Sorrel species (both Common and Sheep's) located in sunny warm, sheltered and open areas around the farm.

*Grassland, Non-farmed areas and Field margins*

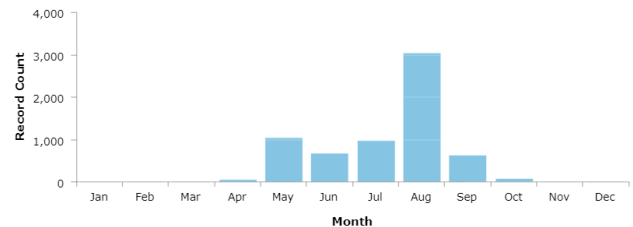
- Encourage some open grassland areas, they are ideal for the Small Copper butterfly.
- Manage non-farmed areas and field margins to become species-rich with native wildflowers. Just cut and lift or graze off the grass each year.

@ Ruth Wilson

## When?

A species that usually has 2 distinct broods, the 1st flight is between April and mid-May, the 2nd in flight between mid-July to August. The earliest they have been recorded in Ireland is 16 January (2019).

### Records per month across all datasets



National Biodiversity Data Centre, Ireland, Small Copper Butterfly, *Lycaena phlaeas* image, accessed August 2023, [Small Copper \(Lycaena phlaeas\) - Detail - Biodiversity Maps](#)

## Where on the farm?

The adult butterfly can be found on wet grassland, woodland edges and rides, clearings, also on bog margins, coastal dunes, sand pits and quarries.

## Value

- Butterflies contribute to some pollination, as they feed on the nectar of plants.
- Butterflies can be an indicator species, as to the health of our natural environment.
- Butterflies have an intrinsic value, they can lift the spirit as they flutter past.



@ Ruth Wilson

## Further Info

There are typically 2 or 3 generations each year, depending on the weather, with 4 generations in extremely good years. The first adults emerge in May, occasionally at the end of April, with the last adults being seen around the middle of October, depending on location.

The adult butterflies often nectar on yellow flowers like ragwort, fleabane and buttercups. They seem to like gardens more later in the year (possibly there are just more of them around to be seen), when they find members of the Aster family including Michaelmas Daisies.

The male in particular is a lively, even aggressive, butterfly. It will adopt a perch from which it will take off to repel all comers, even if they are a lot larger.

Fairly widespread as long as the caterpillar foodplant is present. The female lays her eggs on Common sorrel and Broad leaved Dock (neutral soils). On acid soils, the plant used is Sheep's sorrel.

## Similar species

It is no similar to any other species.

## Affected by a change in climate?

Dry summers may shrivel the sorrels on which its caterpillars feed and the Small Copper may also be experiencing a “developmental trap”: warmer summers encourage the emergence of a third generation of the butterfly in autumn – possibly too late for its caterpillars to easily survive the winter.

## 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\\_siI\\_jhtLZIL97wEWzOy5-k7dtpn#/](https://rise.articulate.com/share/1Pkn_siI_jhtLZIL97wEWzOy5-k7dtpn#/)

You can buy a Butterfly Identification Swatch here:

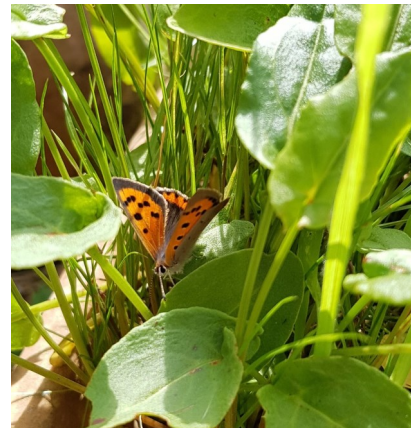
<https://shop.biodiversityireland.ie/>

## 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>



Small Copper butterfly investigating a Sorrel plant to lay her eggs on.

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An Roinn Talmhaíochta,  
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An Chomhairle Oidhreachta  
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