



The Silver-studded Blue Butterfly is a protected species. The females are brown with red spots and the males blue with darker edges and silvery blue wings. They emerge around June and fly until August and mostly feed on the **nectar** from flowers such as heather and gorse.



MALE



FEMALE

- The female butterfly lays her eggs singly and close to the ground where they spend the winter.
- She will always lay her eggs where she can smell ants and close to food sources such as heather shoots.
- The caterpillars hatch from their eggs in the spring.
- They quickly form a close relationship with Black Ants who take them into their nests and protect them from predators such as wasps when they emerge from the nests to feed. The ants tap the body of the caterpillar with their antennae which stimulates them to produce sugary fluids from a gland at the rear of its body which the ant eats.
- The caterpillar grows and sheds its skin four times until it is ready to **pupate** in the ants' nest.
- The adults hatch around June and spend an hour motionless on top of the heather while their wings dry.
- The ants protect them from predators during this time before they fly. The butterflies emerge, and fly and mate, mostly feeding on the **nectar** from flowers such as heather, gorse and birds-foot trefoil until August.

Where and when is the best time to see Silver-studded Blue Butterflies?

Silver-studded Blues form very dense groups called colonies, and in most years can be seen in large numbers at the Pebblebed Heaths. Most only fly a few metres from where they emerged, and they can often be seen fluttering low over the heather in small groups or singly in search of a mate.

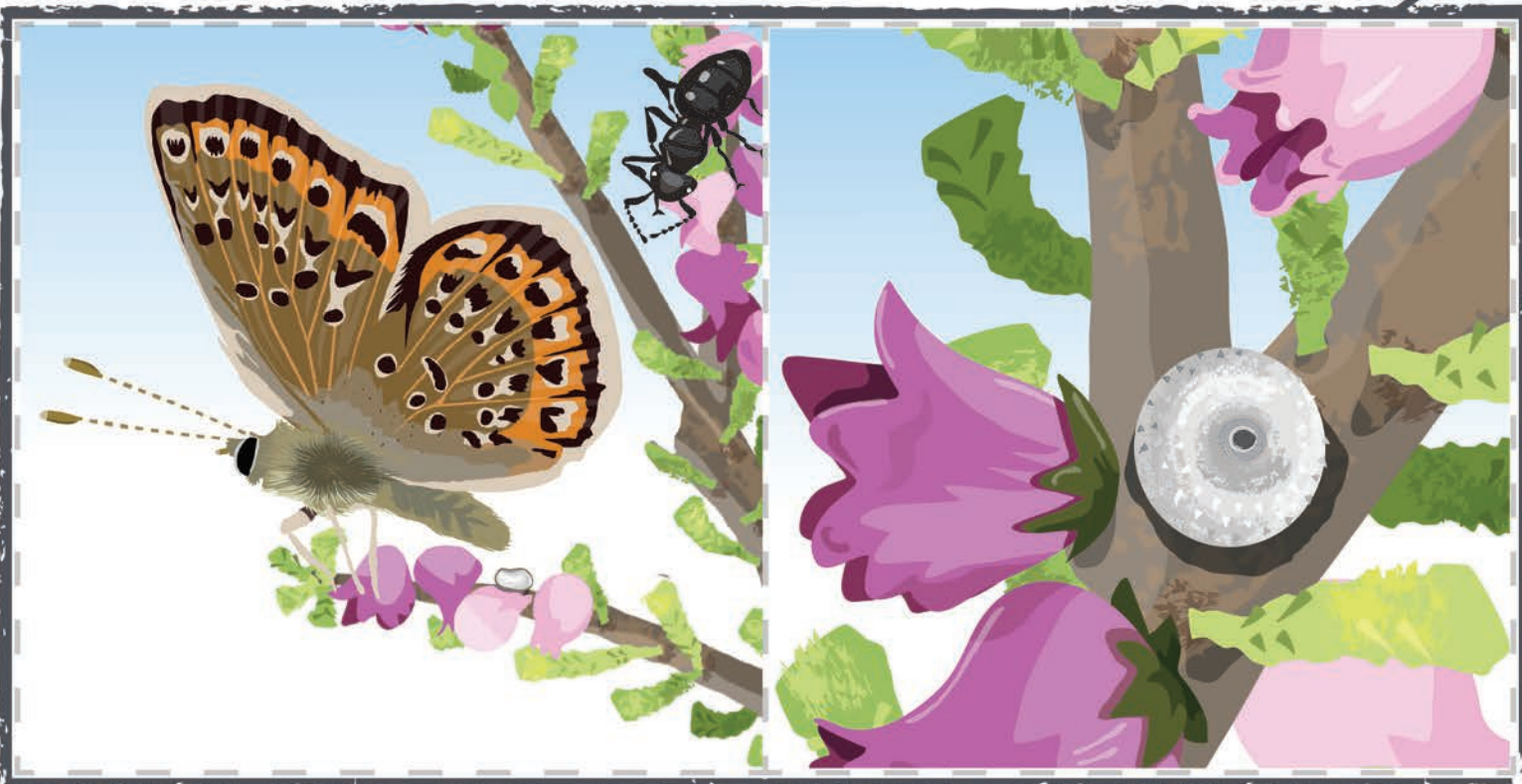
ACTIVITY

Cut out and laminate the illustrations of the life cycle to create a set of cards. Now give out a card to each of 6 students and see if they can get themselves into the correct order.

Also cut out each of the 6 points describing the life cycle and ask the students to match them to the picture they describe.



Use the opportunity to discuss independence; what would happen if the ants were all eaten by a large colony of beetles or other insects? Or if the heather wasn't flowering because of a late snow storm?





This Life Cycle also provides opportunities to explore inter-dependence between different species.

Correct order: