

Small Heath

Coenonympha pamphilus

Insects · On the wing May-Sep



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A small, pale tawny-orange butterfly of dry, short, unimproved grassland — heath, dunes, old quarries and thin verges. The upperside is rarely seen because the butterfly always rests with its wings shut, showing a grey-brown underside with a single small black eyespot near the forewing tip. Small heaths have declined nationally and are a conservation priority.

BEHAVIOUR

It always perches with wings closed, and tilts its body so the wings catch the sun side-on — a way of warming up without exposing the brighter upperside. The flight is low, weak and jerky, seldom more than a few inches above the turf. Caterpillars feed on fine grasses, and the species has declined sharply as unimproved short grassland has been lost.

WHEN TO SEE IT

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QUICK FACTS

FAMILY	Browns (Nymphalidae, subfamily Satyrinae)
WINGSPAN	3–3.5 cm
STATUS	Native; a conservation priority after steep national decline

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