

The Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus*



Holly Blue - female



male

The Holly Blue can be found in gardens and parks in spring and again in late summer. It is often seen flying around head-height along hedge-rows and tree lines. It lays its eggs on the flower buds of a variety of shrubs and plants, but in urban areas it most commonly uses Holly in the spring and Ivy in the late summer. Other frequently used plants include Dogwood, Snowberry and Alder buckthorn.

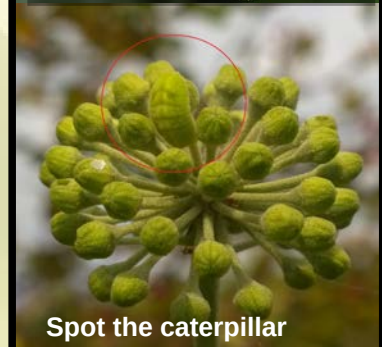
The caterpillar is small, green and grub-like. It is easiest to find on the flower buds of ivy by looking first for the distinctive feeding damage. The caterpillar's head is glossy black and is underneath its body. It nibbles a circular hole in the flower bud and eats the inside using its long neck. The holes are quite easy to spot on the buds and once found, a search for the harder-to-spot caterpillar can begin.

The population of the Holly Blue rises and falls in a four-to-six year cycle in sync with that of the parasitic wasp, *Listrodomus nyctemerus*, which relies completely on the Holly Blue as host. It lays its egg in the caterpillar and the wasp larva develops inside, only emerging as an adult after the caterpillar has pupated. The wasp is very efficient at finding caterpillars, and as numbers of the wasp increase the Holly Blue population crashes. This in turn causes a crash in the wasp population and Holly Blue numbers then rise again.

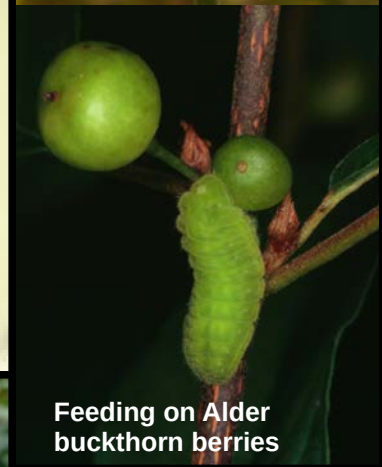
The Holly Blue can be easily confused with its cousin, the Common Blue. However, despite its name, the Common Blue is not a common butterfly in urban areas and if you see a small blue butterfly in your garden it is most likely to be a Holly Blue.



Feeding damage on ivy buds



Spot the caterpillar



Feeding on Alder buckthorn berries



Snowberry



Dogwood



Holly