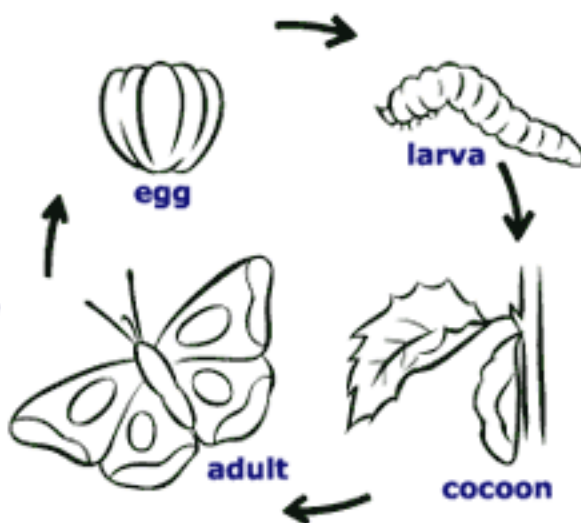


PURPLE EMPEROR

The purple emperor is one of the most spectacular woodland butterflies. It often escapes notice as it spends most of its time amongst the leafy tops of large oak and ash trees and is only seen in the countryside for a few months July - September. Emperor butterflies are territorial, they will chase off other butterflies and even birds that come too close to its resting or look-out place - which is usually a tall tree on the woodland edge.

The purple emperor butterfly tends not to feed on flowers but prefer a variety of food including the honeydew which is secreted by aphids onto leaves of oak. They also feed off the sap from trees and obtain moisture from dirty puddles or rotting corpses of mammals such as voles and hares.

Emperors only lay their eggs on willow trees this usually happens in August. Willows are closely related to willow trees such as weeping willows. The main difference is that willow leaves are short and broad whilst willow leaves are long and thin. After hatching from the egg the tiny larva feeds on the willow leaf. By early November daylight has shortened and the leaves turn yellow and fall off. With nothing to feed on the larvae prepare to hibernate on the branches of the tree. They come out of their long winter sleep in early spring and continue their development into the pupa stage, emerging after pupation in early July as winged butterflies.



The main threats to the future of the purple emperor, are those to most of butterflies, the loss of their habitat - mature hedgerows and natural woodland - decline in quality of the remaining suitable habitat. Today the butterfly is rare and can only be found in a few places in Britain - mainly the oak and natural woods of central southern England.