

The Life and Times of Charlie the Caterpillar

Written by Charlie himself in
New Leaf City

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Caterpillar Life – The Very Beginning

Have you ever seen two butterflies chasing each other around in the sky? Have you ever wondered whether they are courting, or dating, just like humans? Well, indeed they are. That's how butterflies decide whether they are right for one another. Yes, one day, my Mum and Dad were spiralling around to their hearts' content and once they felt sure that they'd found "the one", they flew away together. They were so close that for a while they almost flew like a single butterfly until, after some time, Mum produced an egg.

Charlie the Egg

My memories of life as Charlie the Egg are a bit hazy, but I do remember that there was a small hole in the top of the egg through which I could breathe as I grew. I sucked in as much air as I could. Butterflies tell me that there's an official name for that hole. Apparently it's a 'micropyle'. Well, 'micro' means 'small', so perhaps 'pyle' means 'hole'? Does anyone know? I am still not Professor Charlie the Caterpillar yet, but I am hoping to find out all the answers some day.

Now, while I was still in my Mother's tummy, guess what she did to make sure that I grew up in the right area? She carefully chose the perfect branch on which to hatch her egg. Isn't that clever? Her legs could 'taste' which plants were best for me to grow up on – and such was the early life of Charlie the Egg.

Some butterflies grow up with lots of brother and sister eggs all around them. That wasn't the case for me. I am an only egg, but I get on really well with Mum and Dad, so I am not too worried about it. Mum did worry about wasps though. Apparently they kept trying to eat me, but luckily I was quite small, as eggs go, so they moved on to tastier morsels and left me in peace.

Charlie the Caterpillar

How long do you think I was Charlie the Egg? Five days? Five weeks? Five years? Let me tell you. I was in there for about ten days, at which point I broke out and became, you've guessed it, the one and only, Charlie the Larva Boy, who then became Charlie the Caterpillar, or Charlie the Eating Machine, as some prefer to call me. They say that my whole body is designed to chew and eat and grab a leaf and chew and eat. You get the idea. I am also quite a hairy chap, but please don't be put off. The thing is that I like to keep my predators at bay and those little prickles on my skin do just the job!

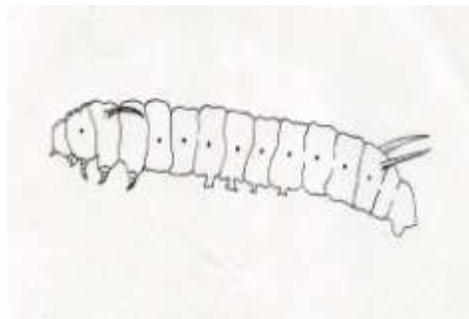
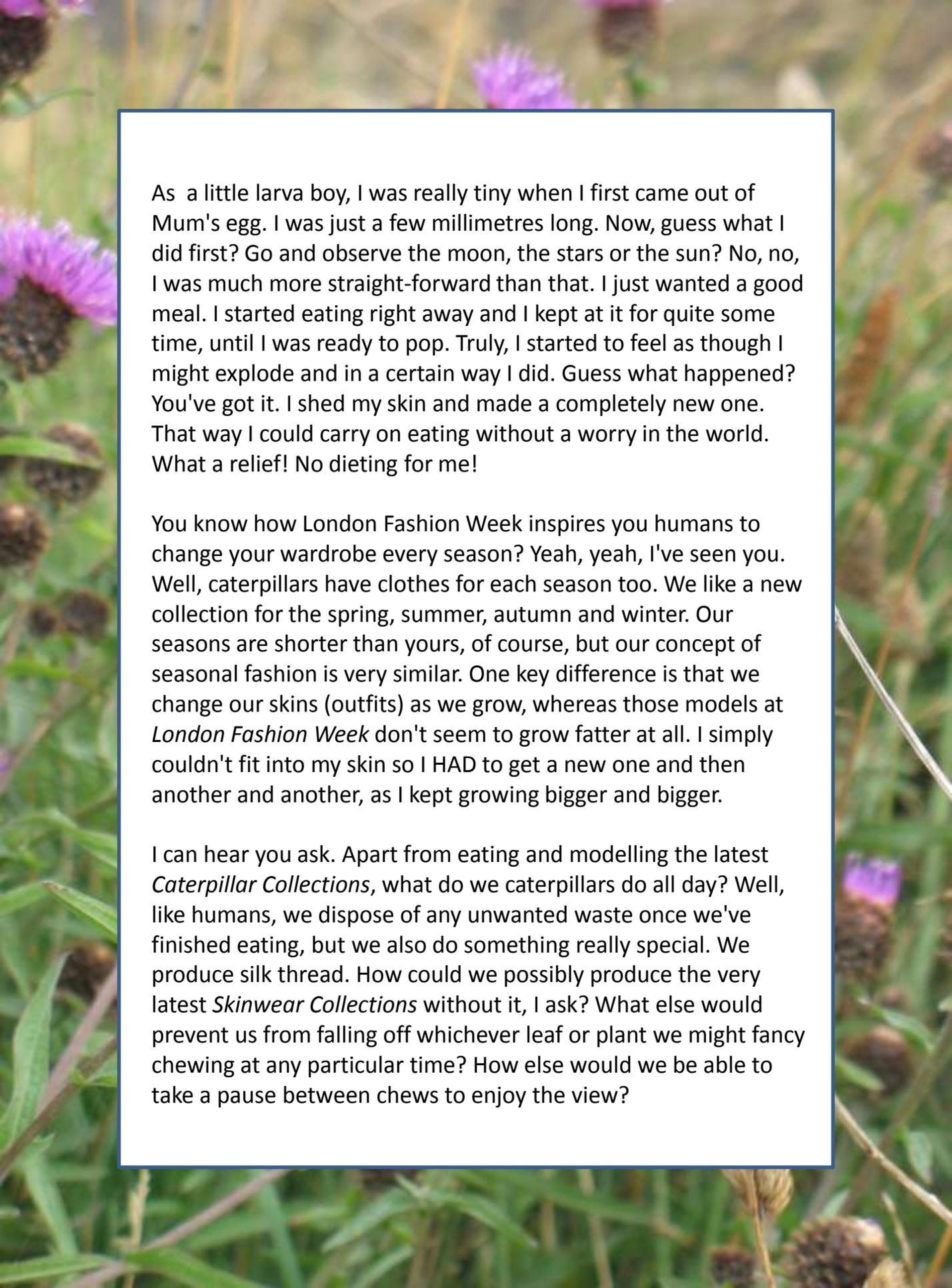


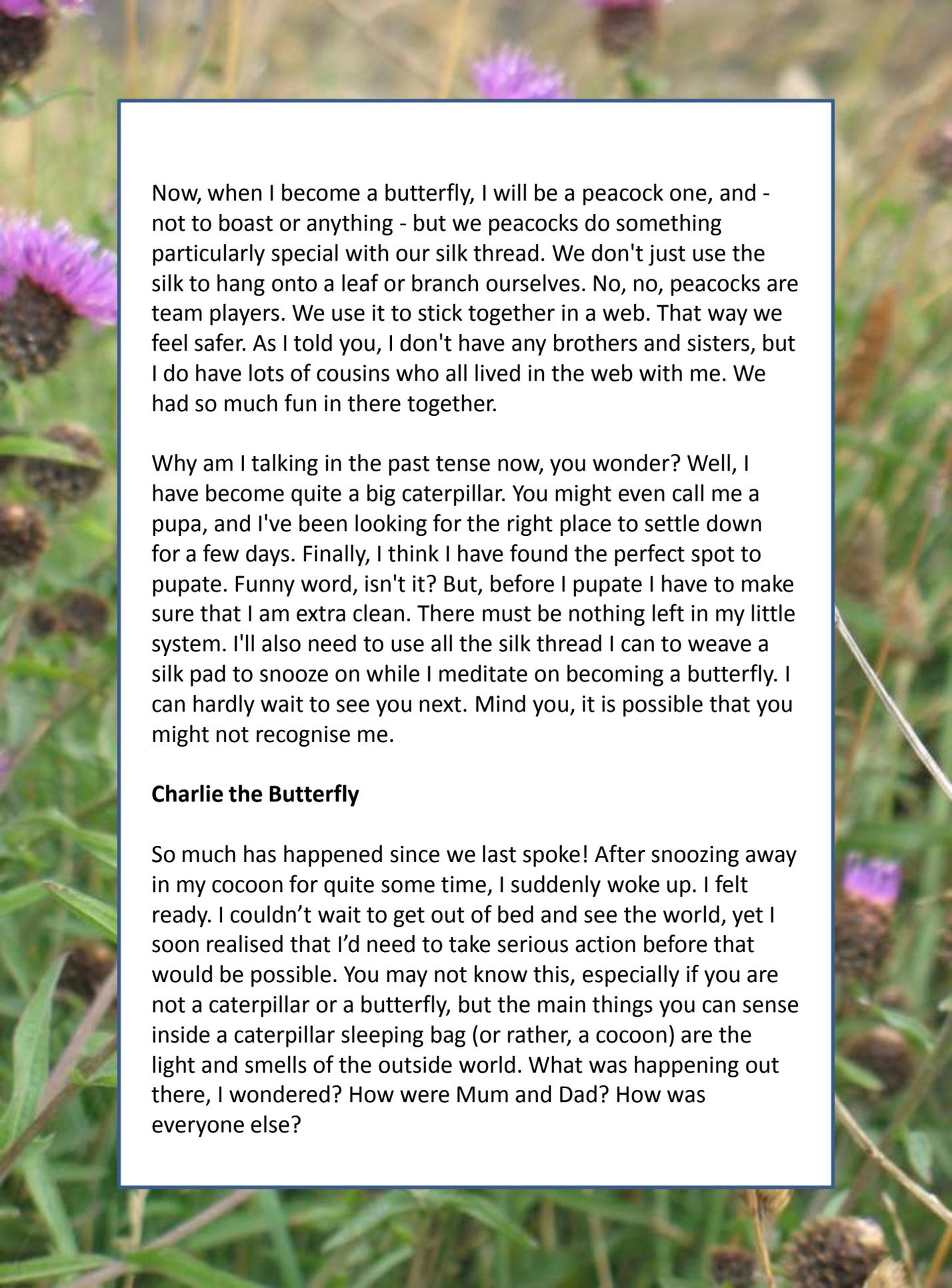
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As a little larva boy, I was really tiny when I first came out of Mum's egg. I was just a few millimetres long. Now, guess what I did first? Go and observe the moon, the stars or the sun? No, no, I was much more straight-forward than that. I just wanted a good meal. I started eating right away and I kept at it for quite some time, until I was ready to pop. Truly, I started to feel as though I might explode and in a certain way I did. Guess what happened? You've got it. I shed my skin and made a completely new one. That way I could carry on eating without a worry in the world. What a relief! No dieting for me!

You know how London Fashion Week inspires you humans to change your wardrobe every season? Yeah, yeah, I've seen you. Well, caterpillars have clothes for each season too. We like a new collection for the spring, summer, autumn and winter. Our seasons are shorter than yours, of course, but our concept of seasonal fashion is very similar. One key difference is that we change our skins (outfits) as we grow, whereas those models at *London Fashion Week* don't seem to grow fatter at all. I simply couldn't fit into my skin so I HAD to get a new one and then another and another, as I kept growing bigger and bigger.

I can hear you ask. Apart from eating and modelling the latest *Caterpillar Collections*, what do we caterpillars do all day? Well, like humans, we dispose of any unwanted waste once we've finished eating, but we also do something really special. We produce silk thread. How could we possibly produce the very latest *Skinwear Collections* without it, I ask? What else would prevent us from falling off whichever leaf or plant we might fancy chewing at any particular time? How else would we be able to take a pause between chews to enjoy the view?



Now, when I become a butterfly, I will be a peacock one, and - not to boast or anything - but we peacocks do something particularly special with our silk thread. We don't just use the silk to hang onto a leaf or branch ourselves. No, no, peacocks are team players. We use it to stick together in a web. That way we feel safer. As I told you, I don't have any brothers and sisters, but I do have lots of cousins who all lived in the web with me. We had so much fun in there together.

Why am I talking in the past tense now, you wonder? Well, I have become quite a big caterpillar. You might even call me a pupa, and I've been looking for the right place to settle down for a few days. Finally, I think I have found the perfect spot to pupate. Funny word, isn't it? But, before I pupate I have to make sure that I am extra clean. There must be nothing left in my little system. I'll also need to use all the silk thread I can to weave a silk pad to snooze on while I meditate on becoming a butterfly. I can hardly wait to see you next. Mind you, it is possible that you might not recognise me.

Charlie the Butterfly

So much has happened since we last spoke! After snoozing away in my cocoon for quite some time, I suddenly woke up. I felt ready. I couldn't wait to get out of bed and see the world, yet I soon realised that I'd need to take serious action before that would be possible. You may not know this, especially if you are not a caterpillar or a butterfly, but the main things you can sense inside a caterpillar sleeping bag (or rather, a cocoon) are the light and smells of the outside world. What was happening out there, I wondered? How were Mum and Dad? How was everyone else?

I wished I knew. I remember calling out to someone moving quite close by, but they didn't seem to hear me, so in the end, I simply focused on myself and, I am telling you, my nickname isn't Charlie the Chewing Machine for nothing! Coupled with my desire to see the world was an appetite so big that I felt like eating my whole cocoon, which was pretty lucky, really, as I had little choice in the matter!

My body had grown in my sleep so it was all quite tight in there, but that seemed to be a good thing as the increased strength and size of the new me helped me push out into the world, while I chewed mightily on the cocoon, until finally my pupa split open and I heaved myself out forever. Wow! That was such a funny feeling! After being cooped up in the cocoon for so long the light seemed incredibly bright and, as I had been all squashed up too, I desperately wanted to stretch as far as I could to rid myself of the bed I had been lying in. Stretch was just what I did, but then, as I got to grips with the new me, I also felt an awful lot of fluid in my system too. It made me feel quite uncomfortable, but I stretched a little more until, finally, all this strange liquid spread into my wings. Yes, I have wings now!

Goodness me! I looked at myself in amazement. Can you imagine going to sleep and then waking up as a whole new being that you can't recognise at all? Talk about identity theft. Someone might never realise that I am still Charlie in a completely new body. Yes, it's me, it's me!

My wings were quite damp at first, covered with the goo from my cocoon, but slowly they dried off and then came my really big worry. In theory, butterflies and caterpillars don't have blood, but in reality, when we've finished hatching, after our huge sleep - our metamorphosis, as the big guys call it - this strange red fluid seeps out of us. It's a bit scary at first, but it's like a marker of a new stage of our life and once this red goo is out of our system, we just know that we're ready to go.

Before I took off, I took a moment to look around me. My colourful wings fascinated me and I suddenly realised how handsome I had become. I mean, one day you're this very unassuming little green caterpillar slowly chewing your way through life and then suddenly, you're a top model and you can even fly. It makes you feel on top of the world, as if anything is possible.

I remember being so excited to fly off for the very first time and look for a mate. After all that time in the cocoon, I was also eager to find that special someone, just as Mum and Dad had done all that time ago. I'm still looking at the moment, because I really want to get it right, but I am optimistic that she's just around the corner. It's hard to believe that it's only a matter of months since Mum and Dad first met. For some of us butterflies all this can take a year or two. It depends where or who we are. After all, variety really is the spice of butterfly life!

