

Mourning Cloak

Mourning Cloak Butterfly (*Nymphalis antopia*)

In 2001, and thanks to House Bill no. 365, the Mourning Cloak was named Montana's Official State Butterfly. The bill was sponsored namely by James Whitaker.

Mourning Cloaks are an abundant species and can be found not only across the U.S. but across the globe. When first presented as a candidate for Montana's official state symbol, many were skeptical – why choose an insect that was not common to Montana alone? But arguments were made in favor of this beauty and it's parallel to life in Montana. Like Mourning Cloaks, Montanans are resilient. Mourning Cloaks are often the first Butterfly to emerge after winter.

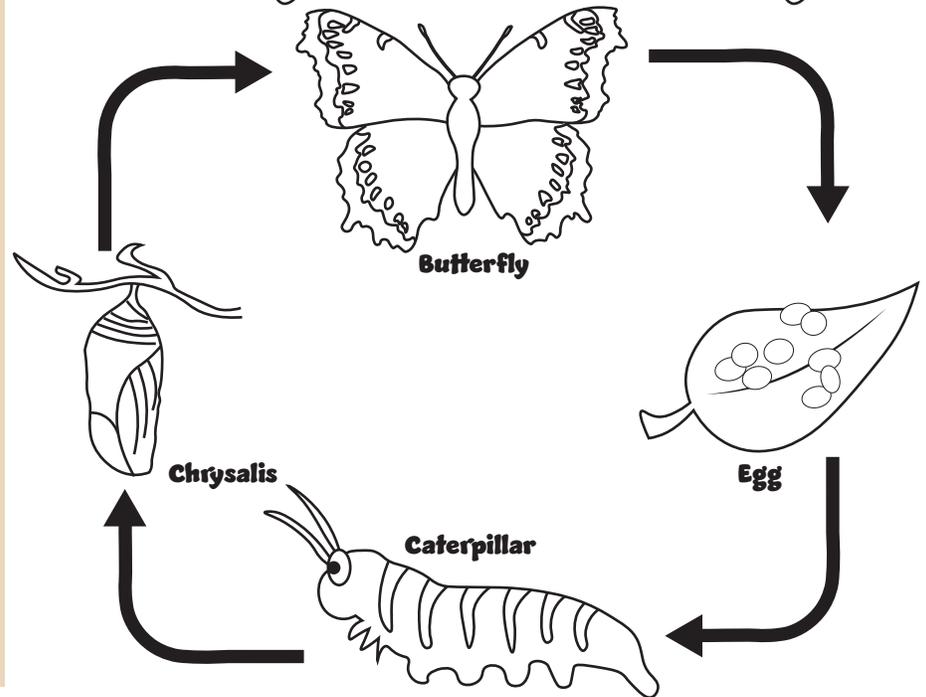


The group are wearing mourning dress for King Frederick William IV of Prussia in a photograph taken circa 1860

Fun Facts

- One of the main sources of food for the Mourning Cloaks is tree sap.
- Mourning Cloak butterflies have one of the longest life spans of any butterflies at 10 months.
- Mourning Cloaks hibernate during the winter and are often the first butterflies to emerge in the spring.
- These butterflies shelter in the rock crevices, under bark, and in wood piles for the winter.
- The caterpillars are roughly 2-inches long.
- The caterpillars eat a wide variety of deciduous tree leaves including: willows, elms, poplars, birch, and more.
- After 10-15 days in its chrysalis, a butterfly will emerge.
- They are known as the "Harbingers of Spring."

Life Cycle of a Butterfly



Did You Know?

"If you look really closely at a butterfly's wings you'll notice that they're very different from a bird wing. Birds have feathers on their wings and the wings are rounded. Butterflies have scales on their wings and they actually have a sharp edge.

When they fly they actually cut the air, kind of like a knife, maybe a butter knife moving through something, like a cup of tea. And then the wings will move and swirl the air, like if you move that knife through your hot cup of tea. That creates a little bit of a vacuum because of a change in pressure and it sucks the butterfly up so it moves higher up in the air. Then they do it again, they cut with the wings, they swirl and that keeps pushing them forward as they fly. The effect is the wings of most butterflies look like they're moving in a figure eight shape, but it happens so fast that it's hard to see and appreciate that figure eight pattern."

— Cailee Smith, ECHO, Leahy Center for Lake Champlain