

Painted lady

Vanessa cardui

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Arthropoda
Class: Insecta
Order: Lepidoptera
Family: Nymphalida

ILLINOIS STATUS

common, native

FEATURES

The painted lady butterfly has a wingspan of two and one-fourth to nearly three inches. Its forewing is pointed. The upper side of the wings is orange-brown with black near the tip of the forewings. The black area includes white spots. The hindwings have a row of four, small, black spots near the edge. The underside of the wings is mottled with gray, brown and black, and there are four, small eyespots near the edge of the hindwing. The front legs are reduced and not used for walking. The caterpillar may be purple to yellow-green with black blotches and a black head.

BEHAVIORS

The painted lady butterfly may be found statewide in Illinois in fields, marshes, dunes and other open areas. It is active from May through October. One to three broods are raised per year. The female lays eggs singly on the top of host-plant leaves. There are more than 100 host-plant species for this butterfly, including thistles. The caterpillar develops in a silk nest. The adult feeds on nectar from plants of the composite family, especially asters, thistles and ironweeds. The painted lady is a migratory insect and recolonizes the state annually with individuals from the deserts of northern Mexico, although a few adults may survive the winter in Illinois.

ILLINOIS RANGE



© Mary Kay Rubey





Aquatic Habitats

marshes; peatlands; wet prairies and fens

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

black soil prairie; dolomite prairie; edge; gravel prairie; hill prairie; sand prairie; shrub prairie