



IAIN H LEACH

Orange-tip ◀▶

Above: Male Left: Female Below inset: Male. IAIN H LEACH

How to ID common whites

Dr Sam Ellis gives tips on how to get to grips with our tricky and widespread white and yellow butterflies

The whites

Identifying our four more widespread whites can be quite tricky. The easiest to identify is the male **Orange-tip** with its distinctive deep orange upperside forewing tips. The underside of the hindwing of both male and female is also distinctive, being mottled green, providing excellent camouflage for the resting butterfly. In flight the female can easily be mistaken for a Small or Green-veined White. In the female, the upperside orange tips are replaced by smaller, grey-black tips which extend down the outer edge of the forewing. The large dark spot is larger in the females and closer to the leading edge of the forewing than those on the other whites.

The **Green-veined White** has distinctive veins lined with dark scales on the yellow underside hindwings. The uppersides are white with dark forewing tips and veins also dusted with dark scales. At the outer forewing edges, the veins end with triangular markings and help distinguish this butterfly from the similar Small White. Females are more heavily marked than males and have two forewing black spots, whereas males have only

one or none. Spring broods produce smaller butterflies than summer broods and spring males can be almost white. Summer brood females have clearer black markings too. The Green-veined White is slower in flight than the Small White and is often found in more sheltered situations and is the white you are most likely to encounter in the uplands.

The Large and Small Whites are often referred to as 'cabbage whites' but they are distinct species. Both have pale yellow underside hindwings which are dusted with grey and whiter underside forewings with pale yellow tips. The uppersides of the **Small White** are white with greyish-black tips that extend further along the leading edge than down the outer forewing edges. Females have two forewing spots



PETER ELLIS

Green-veined White ◀▶

Left: Female
Right: Male



PETER ELLIS

TONY COX



PETER EYLES

Small White ◀▲

Above: Male
Left: Female

Species	Flight Period	Habitat	Distribution
Orange-tip	Mid-April to June	Damp, grassy vegetation in hedgerows, verges, ditches and banks of wetland habitat, meadows, open woodland	UK (local in N Scotland and upland Britain; absent Orkney and Shetland)
Green-veined White	Mid-April to late June; mid-July to mid-Sep	Damp, lush vegetation in hedgerows, verges, ditches and banks of wetland habitat, damp meadows, moorland, open woodland	UK (absent Shetland)
Small White	Mid-April to mid-June; mid-July to Sep	Gardens, allotments, arable fields with brassica crops but can occur in any habitat	UK (local in N and upland Scotland; absent from Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland)
Large White	Mid-April to mid-June; mid-July to Sep	Gardens, allotments, arable fields with brassica crops but can occur in any habitat	UK (local in N and upland Scotland)
Clouded Yellow	April to Oct	Any habitat with leguminous plants (eg: clovers, Lucerne and Common Bird's-foot-trefoil)	UK (less frequently recorded N England, mid and N Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland)
Brimstone	Mar to June; Aug to Oct/Nov	Scrubby grassland, woodland, hedges	England, Wales (local) Northern Ireland (scarce)



STEVE MASKELL

Large White ▲

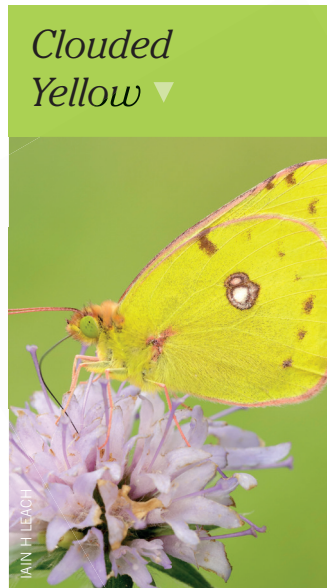
Above: Female

but males only one. Females are darker than males with bolder markings, and the markings of spring brood males can be very faint.

The **Large White** is a larger butterfly than the other three widespread whites, though this doesn't necessarily help to confirm identification when in flight or seen at distance. The uppersides in both sexes are a brighter white than the Small White and the dark markings are blacker. Females have two distinct bold black upperside forewing spots whereas the male has none. The most important identification feature though is the upperside black tips which extend further down the outer forewing edge than in the Small White. With practice these black wing edges can be seen when the butterfly is in flight. Like its close relatives, the markings of both sexes are usually darker in the summer brood than the spring brood.

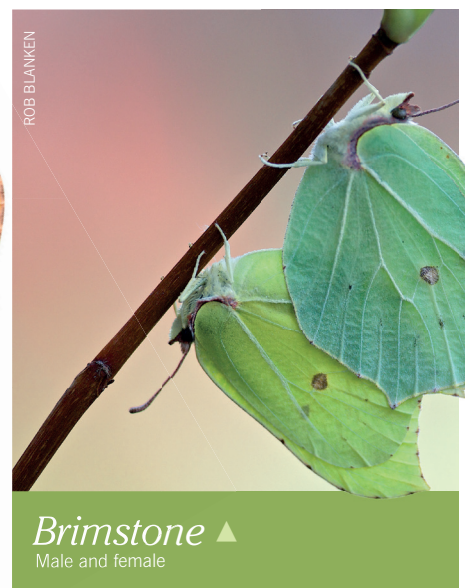
The yellows

Both the Clouded Yellow and the Brimstone always rest with their wings closed. You might think this makes identification difficult, but the fore and hindwing black borders of the **Clouded Yellow** are obvious even in flight and can also be seen from the underside when the butterfly is at rest. The upperwings are orange yellow and there is a silver figure of '8' in the centre of the underside hindwing and a black spot in the underside forewing. The male **Brimstone** has sulphur yellow wings but the female's pale yellow wings means that in



Clouded Yellow ▼

JAIN H LEACH



ROB BLANKEN

Brimstone ▲
Male and female

flight and it could be mistaken for a Large White. When at rest though, the pointed wings, prominent veins and brown spots in the centre of the hindwing make this butterfly look remarkably like a pale yellow leaf.

All our widespread whites can be found in gardens, so if you are doing your Big Butterfly Count, it is well worth taking a closer look at them.