

THE PAINTED LADY (*Vanessa cardui*)

Our butterfly reporter in the field, Barry Bidwell, has noted the very large populations of Painted Ladies (*Vanessa cardui*) this year. Doubtless if you've made it out to the prairies, you've seen them too, moving fast through the warm summer air. The upper-side of the Painted Lady's wings is orange-brown with darker wing bases. The forewing has a black patch and white bar on leading edge. The hind-wing has a row of 5 small black spots and sometimes has blue scales. The underside has a black, brown, and gray pattern with 4 small eyespots. Painted lady butterflies have a wing span of about 5.1 - 7.3 cm).



According to Barry, the large populations this year are due to a population explosion of the butterflies in southern California and northern Mexico. A mild, wet winter there provided ideal conditions for larval feeding, which in turn produced an unusually large population of adults. The adults migrate north to find new breeding grounds. When they are ready to lay their eggs, they do so, mainly on a variety of thistles. These butterflies really get around...they produce one generation and then start the trek back south.

Painted Ladies do not over-winter here so there are years when none are seen in the South sound at all. On average there is, to varying degrees, some kind of migration activity every three or four years. This butterfly is one of the best known species on earth and is sometimes called "The Cosmopolitan" or the "Thistle Butterfly". It is found on all continents except Antarctica. Even Australia has its own subspecies. This butterfly is making appearances at a prairie near you. [Click here to find out how to VISIT.](#)