

Nymphalidae family

Common Brown

Hereronympha merope merope

Abundance in Adelaide area: Common

Flight: Oct–May, only females after Feb

Wingspan: m 56 mm; f 64 mm

Mature larva length: 35 mm

A common but attractive butterfly, the Common Brown breeds on many of the same native and introduced grasses as the Ringed Xenica. It is common throughout the Adelaide region and penetrates significantly into the inner suburbs. It needs open areas as well as treed, shady areas and the grasses on which it breeds. It is strongly attracted to flowers from which it can harvest nectar. Natural gardens and open grass areas will draw this species closer to your house.

The adults begin emerging in mid to late October but only an occasional female is seen until January, when the males begin to die out. By March only females are seen, and these fly as late as early May, laying eggs on or near fresh grass.

Caterpillar food plant: Native and introduced grasses. The caterpillars eat the leaves.

Adelaide native species: Spear Grasses (*Austrostipa* spp.), Kunai Grass (*Imperata cylindrica*), Meadow Rice-grass (*Microlaena stipoides* var. *stipoides*), Tussock Grasses (*Poa* spp.), Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda triandra*) and probably many other native grasses.

Foreign species: Weed grasses — Couch Grass*, False Brome*, Prairie Grass*, Veldt Grass* and others.

The Common Brown is a member of the worldwide subfamily of Satyrs or Browns. These are butterflies that tend to inhabit cooler forest or mountain environments.



The Common Brown is noted for the mystery of what happens to the female butterflies after they hatch. While both male and females of this species hatch in early to mid November, only males are seen flying until after Christmas. While the occasional female may be found perched on the bottom of a woody shrub during the months when they go missing, it still doesn't account for the enormous number of females seen from mid-summer right through autumn. They must be sheltering somewhere, but where is not known!

The male and female of this species are very different in appearance. The males are an orange-brown colour on the upper side of their wings with dark brown markings in the form of dashes and loosely linear patterns. Underneath, the forewing is like a pale version of the upper. The hind wing is a fawn brown with thin dark zigzag markings.

