

## Pieridae family

## Small Grass Yellow

*Eurema smilax***Abundance in Adelaide area:** Uncommon**Flight:** Most common during Sep–Nov**Wingspan:** m 30 mm; f 33 mm**Mature larva length:** 18–22 mm

This highly visible Yellow is a migratory species, seen most years in Adelaide during spring. It will breed if it finds its caterpillar food plants—*Senna* species—in suitable condition. These plants are also very attractive garden specimens. Sennas were a dominant mid-storey plant in the drier areas of the original Adelaide Plains vegetation.

It may be worthwhile trying to grow the food plants around the Adelaide area, especially in frost-free suburbs, as this bright butterfly may surprise us all by raising a family through winter. The female butterflies prefer to lay their eggs on small plants growing in full sun.

**Caterpillar food plants:** Cassias and Sennas. The caterpillars eat the flowers and soft green parts of the plants.

**Adelaide native species:** Puntly Bush (*Senna artemisioides* ssp. *x coriacea*), Desert Cassia (*Senna artemisioides* ssp. *petiolaris*).

During the spring of most years, numbers of the Small Grass Yellow migrate from the more northern areas of the state, where their caterpillar food plant, Puntly Bush (*Senna artemisioides*) grows in abundance.

The butterfly is notable for its bright yellow colouration with black tips on the upper surface forewings. The males are a brighter yellow than the females.

The size of the butterfly is somewhat variable, with smaller than average individuals being seen at times; however, most adults are around 30–33 mm in size.



The *Senna* food plant is commonly encountered in the mid and far north regions of the state, and at one time was present in dryer areas of the Adelaide plains, though very little of this remnant vegetation remains. Because of this and the fact that the butterfly has successfully bred on cultivated *Senna* plants in the Adelaide foothills from eggs laid by migrating butterflies, it is probable that breeding colonies of this species existed in the Adelaide region in the past. Whether the butterfly still continues to breed on the small patch of remaining *Senna* vegetation in the north east of Adelaide is open to speculation. Interstate, this species has been found to use various *Senna* species and other related plants to breed on.

The caterpillars are slender and of a very similar green colour to the *Senna* foliage. They have a darker green marking on the back and lie on the main leaf stem while resting, which makes them very difficult to see. They grow quite rapidly and turn into a green, slender pupa, with a conspicuous 'beaked' projection in the head region.

