

Pearl-bordered fritillary identification

The pearl-bordered fritillary is one of four fritillary butterflies that occur in Scotland. Given a good view, the dark green fritillary and the marsh fritillary are readily distinguishable but the pearl-bordered fritillary is easily confused with the small pearl-bordered fritillary, a widespread and often common butterfly in parts of Scotland.

The key features for distinguishing between these two species are flight period and the pattern on the underside of the hindwing. Despite their names there is very little difference in size, so this is an unreliable feature. It is recommended that a butterfly net is used to gain a close look at the features described above. In most cases an individual can be identified from reasonable photographs, particularly of the underwings.

Table 1: Pearl-bordered fritillary vs. Small pearl-bordered fritillary identification

Characteristic	Pearl-bordered Fritillary	Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary	Comments
Markings on underside of hindwing (see Figs. 1 and 2 below)	Small black dot, 2 'white cells'.	Large Black dot, 7 'white cells'.	White cells may not all look completely white, especially in worn individuals.
Flight Period	Early May to mid-June	Late May to late July	Overlap in flight periods late May to mid-June.
Habitat	Dry woodland glades/edges often on south-facing hillsides. Caterpillars feed predominantly on Dog violet but can use Marsh violet.	Wet open moorland, damp grassland/woodland. Caterpillars feed on Marsh violet.	Habitat requirements often exist side-by-side at the same time.

Pearl-bordered fritillary

Small pearl-bordered fritillary



Figs 1 and 2. Underside of hindwings of Pearl-bordered fritillary (left) and Small pearl-bordered fritillary (right) showing key identification features ©Ern Emmet