

FIND IT

# BUTTERFLIES

DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT - HERE ARE SOUTH AFRICA'S TOP LOCATIONS FOR BUTTERFLIES. BY TABBY MITTINS.

## GAUTENG

You'd think the concrete jungle is less-than-ideal habitat for butterflies, but the Walter Sisulu Botanical Gardens in Johannesburg and Pretoria National Botanical Gardens are great places for a quick butterfly outing, especially between October and June. Look out for twin dotted borders along the footpaths and forest whites along the streams. Costs from R25 a person, [www.sanbi.org](http://www.sanbi.org).



## WESTERN CAPE

The butterflies in the fynbos region are usually small and inconspicuous. Visit Table Mountain National Park between October and February and West Coast National Park between September and December. Costs R40 to R105 a person, free for Wild Card holders, [www.sanparks.org](http://www.sanparks.org). Butterflying in the Knysna Forest is best between December and February. Organise a trip to Brenton Blue Butterfly Reserve in Brenton-on-sea on the Garden Route (email [information@lepsoc.org.za](mailto:information@lepsoc.org.za), [www.brentonblue.org.za/reserve.html](http://www.brentonblue.org.za/reserve.html)) to see one of the world's rarest butterflies, the Brenton blue, in November or February.

An outing to Butterfly World, near Klappmuts, is a great way to get kids excited about butterflies. Over the past 18 years, Esther van der Westhuizen's little butterfly garden has grown into a Shangri-La of striking exotic butterflies from as far as Costa Rica, Malaysia and the Philippines. Costs R48 a person, [www.butterflyworld.co.za](http://www.butterflyworld.co.za).

## LIMPOPO

With numerous accessible reserves and indigenous forests, Limpopo is the only province that rivals KwaZulu-Natal as a butterflyflying region. Lekgalameetse Nature Reserve (turn to page 76 to read about this and other little-known parks) between Hoedspruit and Tzaneen is great year round, with a peak between October and May. Costs from R15 a person and R25 a vehicle, [www.golimpopo.com](http://www.golimpopo.com). The indigenous forests of Magoesbaskloof and Entabeni State Forest are best between October and May, and November and May respectively. Look for large emperors and swallowtails in the indigenous forests. They usually fly high, but can be lured down with bait. Costs from R5 a person and R10 a vehicle, [www.komatiecotourism.co.za](http://www.komatiecotourism.co.za).

## NORTHERN CAPE

Many of the Northern Cape's butterfly species are endemic to the region and very small due to the windy weather. They are, however, often very flashy. Visit Goegap Nature Reserve just outside Springbok between September and November. Costs R15 a person, [www.springbokinfo.co.za/Naturereserves.htm](http://www.springbokinfo.co.za/Naturereserves.htm).

## NORTH WEST

Only two hours from Pretoria, Pilanesberg Game Reserve is the most accessible butterflyflying destination in the North West. You should find butterflies here all year round, but optimise your efforts by searching around Fish Eagle picnic site next to Mankwe Dam, where you can look out for foxy and bushveld emperors close to the top of the hill. Costs from R65 a person and R20 a vehicle, [www.pilanesberggamereserve.com](http://www.pilanesberggamereserve.com).

## MPUMALANGA

Focus your efforts around Mariepskop and the forests near Graskop between October and May. The grasslands around Graskop are most productive in October and November. Ezemvelo Nature Reserve near Bronkhorstspuit is small, relatively unknown and easily overlooked, but is great between September and April. Look for small, inconspicuous butterflies. Costs R45 a person and R20 a vehicle, [www.ezemvelo.co.za](http://www.ezemvelo.co.za).

## FREE STATE

The Free State might not have a reputation as a butterflyflying hotspot, but that doesn't mean they're not there. Golden Gate Highlands National Park near Clarens is the best place in the province to search, especially in December and January. Look for a variety of dark brown butterflies in the grasslands and Golden Gate blues and rangers next to the mountain streams. Costs from R36 a person, free for Wild Card holders, [www.sanparks.org](http://www.sanparks.org).

## KWAZULU-NATAL

Few regions can compete with Zululand when it comes to butterflyflying. It's hard to miss the great variety of butterflies that call iSimangaliso Wetland Park home. Colourful species such as the gold-banded forester and forest queen are found here. Butterflying is great throughout the year because of high average temperatures. It peaks around March and, in May, hundreds of butterflies congregate around the dune soapberry bushes along the dune forest trails. Costs from R35 a person and R40 a vehicle, [www.isimangaliso.com](http://www.isimangaliso.com). In the Drakensberg, look out for small butterflies around midday. Because conditions are usually windy, they often fly low and find shelter in the grass. Larger, more conspicuous butterflies are found in the gardens of resorts. The best season is between November and June.



## EASTERN CAPE

Go butterflyflying on the Wild Coast all year round, but March to May is best. Port St Johns is a good base as it's easily reachable and has a number of forests close by that can be explored on foot - those around Mbotyi are particularly productive. It's a great area to look for large butterflies such as the emperors.

*Butterflies need heat and sunshine and climate plays a big role in breeding cycles and activity, so each region has periods that are more productive than others. The cold winter months (June to August) are usually poor for butterfly-watching.*

Villiers Steyn

