

Butterfly — Saqalngatak

SAQALNGATAM SAQUI CUCUNARTUT.—THE BUTTERFLY'S WINGS ARE PRETTY.



Photo: Fritillary butterfly, Kodiak Island, 2021. Photo
Courtesy of Keith Bruce, AM888

Butterflies are insects of the order lepidoptera, a group that also includes moths. Scientists recognize five distinct families of butterflies in Alaska with about eighty-four unique species. These colorful creatures are found in many environments, from the ocean shore to mountain peaks and from the rainforests of southeast Alaska to the arctic tundra of the far north. Although butterflies require more study, Kodiak's known species include the Arctic Skipper, Kodiak Parnassian, Alaskan Fritillary, Whitehorse Fritillary, Milbert's Tortoiseshell, Kodiak Ringlet, and a variety of white butterflies that remain to be classified.

Butterflies pass through four life stages—moving from eggs to caterpillar, pupa, and finally butterfly. In warm places, butterflies complete this cycle in one season. In Alaska, it takes some butterflies two seasons, with the larva hibernating through the winter. For example, the larva of the grey and white-winged Kodiak ringlet hibernates in blades of grass. In Alaska, butterflies are maximally present from late April to late September, although some species have much shorter airtime. Midday is the best time to see butterflies. This is when the sun heats the air and energizes these colorful insects.

The Alutiiq word for butterfly, bird, and duck all come from the word *saquq* meaning wing. This is likely because butterflies are recognized by their large, colorful wings. Some people also refer to these insects as *papaac'kaa*, an Alutiicized version of the Russian word for butterfly.