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**Butterfly Painting Workshop: Illustrating the Chequered Skipper *Carterocepahalus palaemon***

*This step by step guide is designed to accompany the film made for Butterfly Conservation.*

*You should also have 4 other documents along with this; Chequered skipper templates, a page of reference with a photo and info on wing veins, a step by step visual guide, and an equipment list.*

*Be aware that sticking to all these steps will take a long time. If you want a swifter result, you could go through to step 7, and then just add darker areas of colour without using the tiny brush strokes technique.*

*This approach is how I illustrate all the butterflies I get asked to draw. To see more examples, take a look at my website:* [*https://lizzieharper.co.uk/gallery/lepidoptera/*](https://lizzieharper.co.uk/gallery/lepidoptera/) *There are also some step by step guides to illustrating other species of butterfly in amongst my blogs:* [*https://lizzieharper.co.uk/category/zoological-step-by-step/*](https://lizzieharper.co.uk/category/zoological-step-by-step/)

**1. Gathering reference**

Get reference together. A real specimen is always great, but be aware dead and pinned specimens hold their wings differently to living butterflies. In this case Butterfly Conservation has provided us with a photo. If you use photos you find online, do contact the photographer and ask for permission to use their images.

It’s advisable to have several photos to refer to, in order to avoid perpetuating mistakes that may occur in one photo, and to give a better “feel” to what the norm for the species is like.

**2. Draw up the Butterfly**

You can do this 3 ways. First, draw the butterfly by hand. Check your measurements, and that your drawing has the correct proportions. Do this by checking against your reference.

Second approach is simply to trace the photo and transfer the tracing to hotpress watercolour paper (see below). You only need to draw or trace one half of a butterfly as they are symmetrical. Flip the tracing paper to get the other half.

The third way is to use the template provided (with or without markings).

If you’re drawing freehand, a good way to draw a perfectly straight line (which you’ll need for antennae and veins) is simply to look at where the line is going, rather than at the tip of your pencil. This comes in handy when you’re using a paintbrush later on.

**3. Add the markings**

If you’ve been sure to include the venation in your drawing, this isn’t too hard, just plot them in, using the veins as a map. If you’re doing a tracing, you’ll already have this information.

To avoid confusion, you can use a very light pencil to write the letter “Y” on the yellow spots.

**3. Transfer the drawing to Hotpress watercolour paper**

Again, there are various ways of doing this. One is by using “tracedown” or “push-through paper” which has graphite on one side. Insert this under your tracing and the watercolour paper, then redraw your tracing.

A second way is to draw over the back of your tracing with soft graphite, then re-draw the tracing.

The third and easiest is to make sure your drawn lines are on the side of the sheet touching the watercolour paper (you’ll need to redraw your tracing on the other side of the sheet to achieve this). Then find a hard, blunt object, stick your tracing down with masking tape, and rub (not too hard). The graphite will transfer onto the watercolour paper.

**4. Check your drawing with the reference**

Does it look symmetrical? Are the wings lined up correctly? Is the body the right width? Fix errors now, you won’t be able to make changes once you begin painting.

**5. Mix up your colours for a colour map / first layer of colour: Browns**

The brown of the Chequered skipper is a warm, purplish colour. Mix Vandyke brown, Cobalt blue, and purple (or similar colours) to achieve this. Add clean water to make the colour more dilute.

When you’re painting, always try to follow the direction of growth – in this case, echo the direction of wing veins, and growth of the fur on the body. The harder you press the thicker the line. Make sure you allow the tip of the brush to follow the brush stroke; don’t push in the opposite direction to the bristles unless you want a thick and uncontrolled line.

Consistency of paint is important. For paler colours (made pale by diluting with water, not by adding chalky white watercolour paint) it’ll be quite watery. For darker colours you’re looking for a mix with a consistency a little like single cream, or blood.

Plot in the areas of brown, making the colour more diluted (and thus paler) towards the edges of the wing, and darker (less dilute) at the edges of the veins. Keep highlights and veins as white paper. In watercolour, your white paper is your brightest area of colour, so don’t swallow it up.

Don’t forget to plot in the browns of the butterfly body too, adding texture by doing longer brush strokes to emulate the hairs.

Once bone dry, and being aware of the veins, you can now rub out pencil lines showing the markings before adding the yellow. Rubbing out over the brown paint will not lift the pigment but will remove the pencil.

**6. Mix up your colours for a colour map/ first layer of colour: Yellows**

The yellow is a mix of Naples yellow, Gamboge hue, and Cadmium orange. Any mix of Naples yellow plus a lemon-y yellow and a touch of orange should work fine.

Apply this semi-watery mix to the edges of the yellow spots, and the edges of the wing veins. With a lightly paler (more dilute) yellow, fill in most of the spots, only leaving white paper for highlights.

Add the yellows to the area of the body that need it; a horseshoe shape at the top of the thorax, the head, tail, and the clubs on the antennae.

**7. Add details and texture: Yellows**

Starting with the yellow, add depth, colour, and detail to your illustration by building up lots of tiny brushstrokes.

Mix a slightly darker yellow than before – less dilute with a tiny bit more orange.

The more strokes you make, the darker and more saturated that area will be. For the yellows, focus on making these marks on the edges of the veins, and on the edges of the yellow spots.

**7. Add details and texture: Browns**

Mix a slightly darker brown by making a less dilute mix, and tweaking the ratio of the purple, brown and blues.

Using tiny strokes, lay down depth and colour, and build tonality and vibrance into your painting. Focus on the edges of the veins, the wide areas of solid brown, and where the wings attach to the body.

In the Chequered skipper, all the wing veins are dark brown, so outline these. Make the edges of them less stark by softening them with the occasional tiny brown spot along their length.

When you come to an area of yellow, use shorter choppy lines to transition between the colours. Lots of tiny dots will also help, and look a little like butterfly scales.

Don’t forget to work into the butterfly body. Look at your reference to try and understand the direction of growth of the hairs, and let this inform your brush strokes.

**8. Adding detail: Antennae and eyes**

For the antennae and eyes, you need a darker colour, closer to black. Mix some of your Brown with indigo (or a greenish dark blue) and a touch of purple. This makes a much prettier black than a pre-mixed colour.

With a steady hand and a light touch, outline the antennae. Then fill in the black stripes. Once completely dry, get a very dilute bit of Cobalt blue and carefully put a thin line of this on either side, on the antennae, to provide shadow.

For the eye, using the same mixed black, outline the edge of the eye. Paint around the highlight, where the light reflects from the compound eye. Once dry, dilute your black to a very pale grey, and add a subtle concentric circle of this around the highlight of the eye. If you mess up, don’t worry. You can always pick out the white shine on the eye with a bit of permanent white gouache.

**9. Tweak your Yellows**

Towards the body, and on the outside edges of the Chequered skipper’s wings, the yellow is a bit more orange.

Mix up a slightly darker yellow (by adding more orange, or even a touch of your brown).

Using the same technique of tiny brush strokes, add this colour to the areas that need it, always referring to your reference. Don’t forget the butterfly body – there’s plenty of yellow in that horseshoe shape around the top of the thorax, on the head, and on the fluffy “tail” or base of the abdomen.

**10. Tweak your Browns**

Mix up a darker and bluer brown, by altering the ratio of the blue/ brown/ purple mix.

Using brush strokes to copy the fur, paint in lots of hairs that cover the butterfly body, always following the direction of growth. Top with a dilute and watery brown mix, and allow to dry.

**11. Knock back the veins on the wings**

Using a brown, simply paint over the wing veins (which up til now have remained white).

**12. Pick out your darkest darks**

Mix a nice dark brown/black with your brown, blue, indigo, and purple. Using the paint quite thick, and with the same tiny brush strokes, pick out your darkest areas. At the junction of body and wing, where the top wing slightly overlaps the lower wing, in the middle of the large areas of crown, on the body.

**13. Add hairs to the thorax and abdomen**

Mix some Permanent white gouache with your yellow and using very light strokes, add some hairs to the thorax edges.

Do the same, but with a little black in, to add texture to the abdomen. Don’t overdo it. Play around til it looks right.

**14. Finished!**

Well done! Go and make yourself a well-earned cup of tea.

Never feel disappointed with a painting you’ve done. If it goes well, that’s lovely. It if doesn’t, have a think about what you can learn from it. Did you cover up all the whites of the page too fast? Did you overwork it? Do you need to practise to get your brush strokes finer?

Also, be aware, using this approach takes a long time. It took me a good 10 hours to paint this Chequered skipper, and I’ve been doing it for years. The more you paint, the more confident you’ll become, and the better you’ll get.

**Conclusion**

I hope the combination of handouts, these written notes, and the film have proved useful. It goes without saying that this approach will work for every butterfly or moth you choose to illustrate.

If you have any questions, or if you’d like to send me photos of your finished butterflies, I’d love to hear from you. My email is: **info@lizzieharper.co.uk**

Finally, thanks for sticking with it. It’s a long process, and anyone who claims painting is relaxing hasn’t been doing this sort of painting! I really appreciate your working so hard, and reckon you should be really pleased with yourselves, no matter what the finished illustration looks like.