Butterfly Dimorphism
Museum of Comparative Zoology

These four butterflies were previously on display in the exhibit *Language of Color*. Additional specimens are currently on view in the exhibit *Arthropods: Creatures that Rule* at the Harvard Museum of Natural History.

Male Blue Morpho and Birdwing Butterflies show much richer and brighter coloration on the backs of their wings than do females. Many butterflies show some sexual dimorphism or sex differences in color and pattern, but such strong differences are the exception rather than the rule among lepidopterans.

Brightly-colored male butterflies flash their colors to attract multiple female mates. Females, by contrast, are more selective in the choice of a mate to father their brood. Over time, their choices have influenced the evolution of bright colors and patterns in males. Recent experiments designed to examine female choice in some butterflies, have shown that females often prefer color characteristics, such as UV-reflective markings, that appear striking to a butterfly's eye, but are invisible to our own.

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