

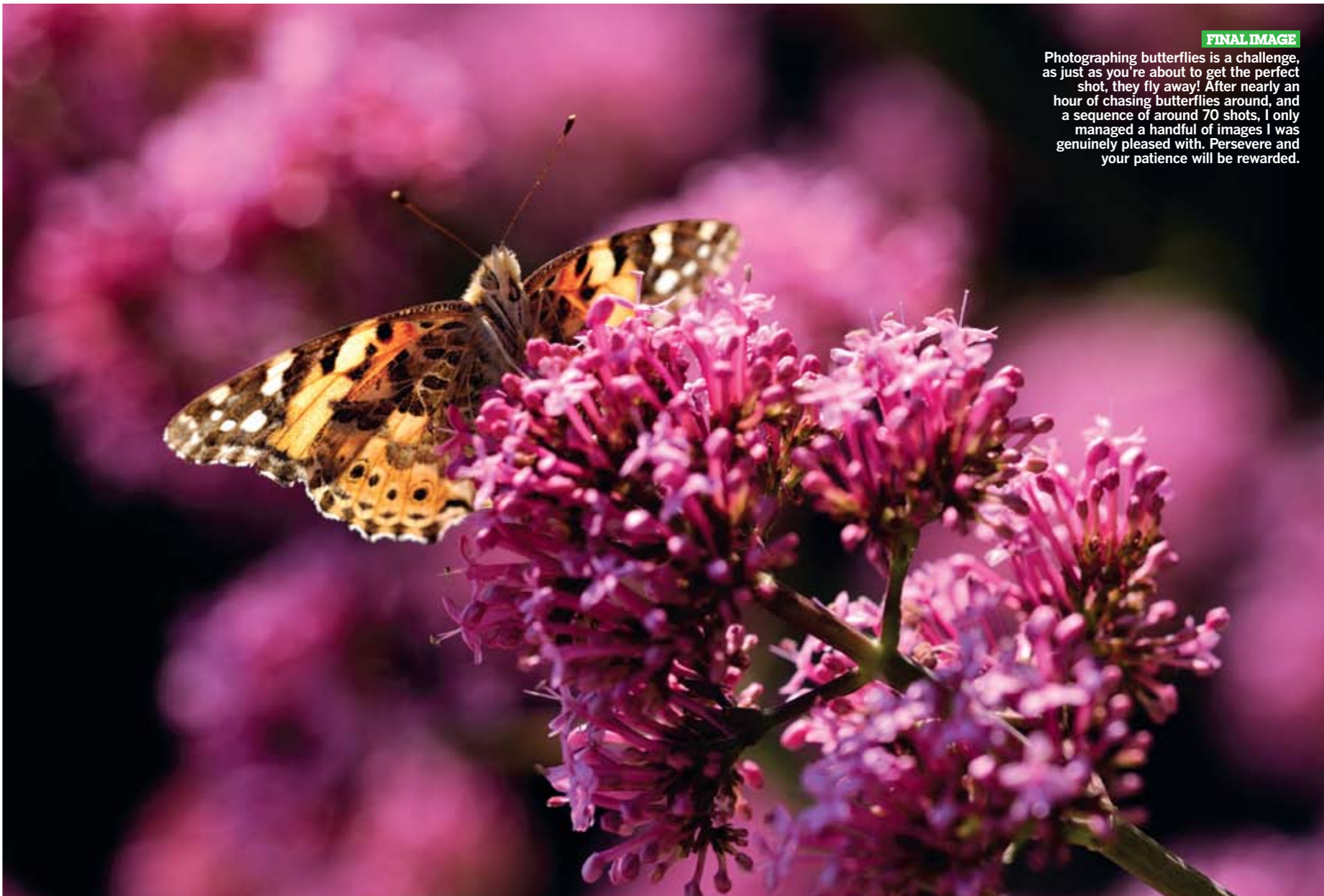
PROTIPS
SHOOTING MODE
Aperture-priority mode allows you control over depth-of-field, whilst the camera sets the corresponding shutter speed to ensure you can work quickly and with the minimum of fuss

GETTING PREPARED
When 'stalking' butterflies, you have no option but to keep your set-up simple. A tripod often proves impractical – being too fiddly and time-consuming to position, and greatly increasing the risk of disturbing your subject. However, presuming it's a fine, sunny day, there should be sufficient light to enable you to select a shutter speed upwards of 1/200sec – fast enough to freeze subject and camera movement. When working handheld, keep your elbows pushed in towards your chest to limit camera shake. If you do require the added stability of a support, consider using a monopod, which is easier to position and shouldn't disturb the surrounding plants. Butterflies rarely feed or rest for long, so you will need to focus and compose your image quickly – something that gets easier with practise.

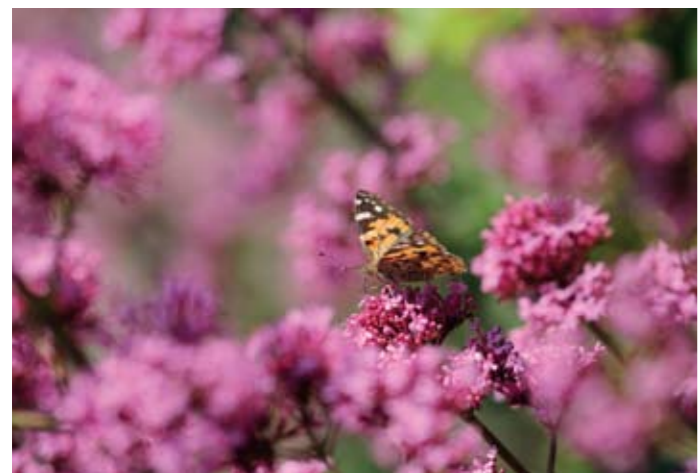


Essential kit

MACRO LENS It isn't really fair to suggest that a macro lens is an 'essential' piece of kit when photographing butterflies. Budget alternatives, like close-up filters, are capable of very good results. Also, many modern zooms offer a 'macro' facility, which provides a highly useful reproduction ratio of up to 1:2 (half life-size), which is good enough to fill the frame with larger species. However, a dedicated macro is the best choice for wildlife close-ups. For flighty insects, a 'tele-macro', such as a 90mm or 100mm, is a good choice. Not only do they offer superb image quality up to 1:1 (life-size), but this type of focal length creates a more practical camera-to-subject working distance, minimising the risk of disturbance and, therefore, maximising the photographer's chances of success. A macro of this length is also relatively compact and lightweight, making sharp results possible when handheld – even without image-stabilising technology.



FINAL IMAGE
Photographing butterflies is a challenge, as just as you're about to get the perfect shot, they fly away! After nearly an hour of chasing butterflies around, and a sequence of around 70 shots, I only managed a handful of images I was genuinely pleased with. Persevere and your patience will be rewarded.



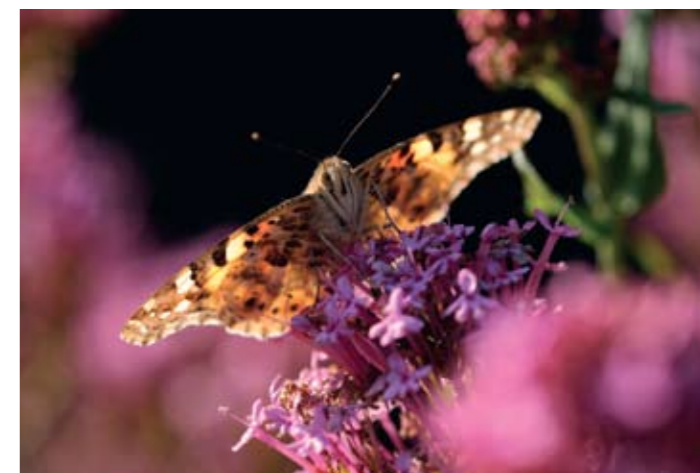
1 NOT CLOSE ENOUGH I began by simply watching the butterflies for a few minutes, observing their habits and which plants they preferred. The Red Valerian was a clear favourite, so I stood nearby, camera at the ready. As the butterfly lands, approach it slowly, gradually moving the camera to your eye. Older insects can look tatty, with faded colours, so only snap butterflies in pristine condition. My first efforts were disappointing, as I shot from too far away, so the butterfly is not large enough in the frame. I needed to get closer.



2 BE AWARE OF YOUR BACKGROUND Be aware of what is going on behind your subject, as a messy backdrop will ruin your image. With practise, it becomes easier to let your eye wander around the frame while you focus and compose your shot. A small change in shooting position can eliminate distracting foliage from the frame. Alternatively, a wider aperture will throw the background out of focus. However, sometimes, there is nothing you can do other than wait until the butterfly moves to a more photogenic position.



3 DEPTH-OF-FIELD This is crucial in close-up photography. Too much, and background detail will be too defined. Too little and the subject won't be sharp throughout. A good general rule is to set the widest aperture that will still keep your subject acceptably sharp. This also ensures that the shutter speed is fast enough to freeze subject and camera movement. In this instance, after reviewing a handful of test frames, I found that f/7.1 generated sufficient depth-of-field, whilst throwing the vegetation behind pleasantly out of focus.



4 SHOOTING ANGLE Generally, if a butterfly is resting or feeding with its wings open flat, photograph it from above. If its wings are closed, shoot from one side. Regardless of whether the wings are open or closed, try and keep your camera parallel – if not, its wings will begin drifting out of focus. However, you don't always have to opt for conventional angles. Try shooting straight on at eye-level or from a low viewpoint, for instance. With this shot, I combined the two approaches to create a more original looking result.