

# West Virginia White

*Pieris virginiensis*



Status: **Special Concern**

## Threats:

- ◆ Habitat loss and fragmentation (logging, clearing land for agriculture or residential development)
- ◆ Use of insecticides for controlling gypsy moths
- ◆ Replacement of larval food source (toothwort) by the closely-related invasive garlic mustard



## Description:

- ◆ Small butterfly with a 3-4 cm wingspan
- ◆ Wings are dusky white and somewhat translucent; veins on the underside of the hind wing have grey-brown scaling
- ◆ Caterpillar is yellowish-green with a green stripe along each side; body is covered with a short, dense layer of hairs
- ◆ Pupa is typically green to brownish in colour and attached to a plant stem with silk at both the terminal end and a loop around the middle

## Biology:

- ◆ One of the first butterflies active in the spring
- ◆ Larva feed on the leaves of the toothwort plant; mustard oils retained from these plants make adults distasteful to predators
- ◆ Adults feed on the nectar of woodland flowers
- ◆ Adults survive 5-10 days; mate quickly upon emergence from the pupa
- ◆ Small white eggs are laid on the leaves of the toothwort plant; short egg and larval stages are followed by an extended pupa stage (10-11 months)

## Habitat:

- ◆ Rare in Ontario; found in only ~50 sites
- ◆ Found in areas of moist, mature, undisturbed maple-beech-birch forest that contain large populations of toothwort
- ◆ Rarely ventures from dense forest into treeless habitats

Species at Risk  
STEWARDS' GUIDE SERIES

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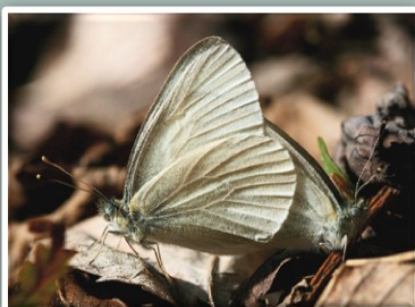
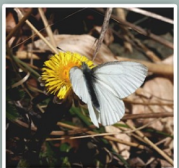
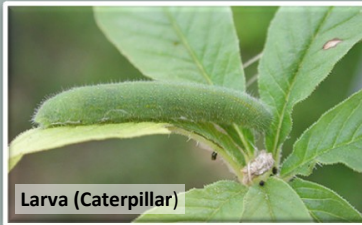
## *Pieris virginiensis*

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### West Virginia White on Your Property? Here's What You Can Do:

- ◆ **Protect and encourage native wildflower habitat in your forest.** Promote the growth of native toothworts for larvae. Other woodland flower species, such as trillium, spring beauty and Canada violet, provide nectar for the adults.
- ◆ **Learn to identify garlic mustard and do not introduce it or other invasive species to your property.** Invasives like garlic mustard are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to remove once introduced and can have a detrimental effect on native flora and fauna. Choose to use native plants when landscaping.
- ◆ **Support sustainable agricultural practices.** Look for farms that have an Environmental Farm Plan.
- ◆ **Support sustainable forestry practices when you purchase wood products.** Look for an FSC logo.
- ◆ **Learn More.** Check out the Species at Risk section on the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources website at [www.mnr.gov.on.ca](http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca).



### Did You Know?

The West Virginia White Butterfly doesn't migrate!

It also avoids areas without trees, such as hydro corridors, roads and open fields.

These factors tend to isolate populations from one another in islands of forests surrounded by "hostile" habitat.

This isolation, coupled with an increase in the relative amount of edge habitats, expose butterfly populations to a whole host of additional stresses.

### Ontario's Endangered Species Act

Ontario's *Endangered Species Act, 2007* came into force on June 30, 2008, making Ontario a North American leader in the protection of species at risk and their habitats.

Compared to Ontario's previous Act, written in 1971, the new ESA 2007 provides:

- ◆ Science-based assessment of species' status
- ◆ Automatic protection of a species and its habitat once it's listed as endangered or threatened
- ◆ Broader protection for species at risk and their habitats
- ◆ Greater support for volunteer stewardship efforts of private landowners, resource users, and conservation organizations
- ◆ A commitment to recovery of species through recovery planning
- ◆ Greater accountability, including government reporting requirements

Ontario is home to more than 30,000 species, most of which have stable populations.

However, more than 180 species in Ontario, 34 of which are found in Parry Sound-Muskoka, are currently considered "at risk" because of threats like:

- ◆ Habitat loss
- ◆ Global changes in insect populations
- ◆ Pollution
- ◆ Invasive species
- ◆ Climate change
- ◆ Over-harvesting
- ◆ Road mortality



Learn more about Species at Risk on the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources website at [www.mnr.gov.on.ca](http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca).