Nature Notes

First record of a Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta rubria* (Fruhstorfer) in Trinidad, West Indies

Midafternoon on 13 September 2024, A. Hosein photographed a butterfly on the ground on the Biche Otoire Road, Biche in Eastern Trinidad (Fig. 1) and submitted it to iNaturalist the following day (Hosein 2024). Here, its identification was confirmed by John Morrall, among others, as the Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta.* As far as the authors can establish, this represents the first known record of this species for Trinidad.

This individual represents the subspecies *V. a. rubria*, sometimes referred to as the American Red Admiral. Field (1971) separated subspecies *rubria* from the nominate Western Palaearctic *Vanessa atalanta atalanta* (Linnaeus) as follows: 'Forewing above and below with subapical white bar extending from costa to vein M2, narrow; black spots in marginal orange or orange-red band on hindwing reduced in size'. Howe (1975) stated '*rubria* differs mainly from the nominate *atalanta* … chiefly in the somewhat larger apical white bar on the forewing upperside, just beyond the cell-end'.

The range for this subspecies is thought to be North America, south to Guatemala, the Greater Antilles (excluding Puerto Rico), northern Bahamas (strays) and Venezuela (Warren *et al*. 2024). iNaturalist (2024) shows the majority of citizen science observations are in Southern Canada, most of the USA and in Mexico.

Neild (2008) stated that *V. atalanta rubria* is known only from a single specimen in Venezuela. He confirms (pers. comm) that as of October 2024, that remains the case. Riley (1975) stated that "odd specimens have been taken in Bermuda, Cuba, Hispaniola and quite recently, on the Blue Mountain Peak in Jamaica." He had no doubt that all were vagrants. However, Schwartz (1989) considered this species had become a breeding resident in Hispaniola, the closest place to Trinidad that *V. atalanta rubria* is regularly found, approximately 1600km away.

Turner (2017) states that it is a very rare migrant in Jamaica with only three known specimens. He comments on its migration habits as follows. 'Beginning in October, individuals of this subspecies migrate southward through West Central Florida. They continue to move farther South as cold fronts move down the peninsula. Only a few individuals are seen moving South each year, but in Spring beginning as early as February, depending on the temperature, larger numbers of individuals fly back North again'.

The foodplants of *V. atalanta rubria* larvae in North America consist of urticaceous species (Stinging Nettles), *Urtica* spp. and *Parietaria* spp., which are not listed as present in Trinidad (Baksh-Comeau et al. 2016). However, a number of other species from the Urticaceae are found in Trinidad, including species of *Boehmeria, Pilea, Phenix, Urera*, *Laportea* and *Cecropia.* It is possible some of these could be suitable foodplants should *V. atalanta rubria* individuals ever breed on the island.

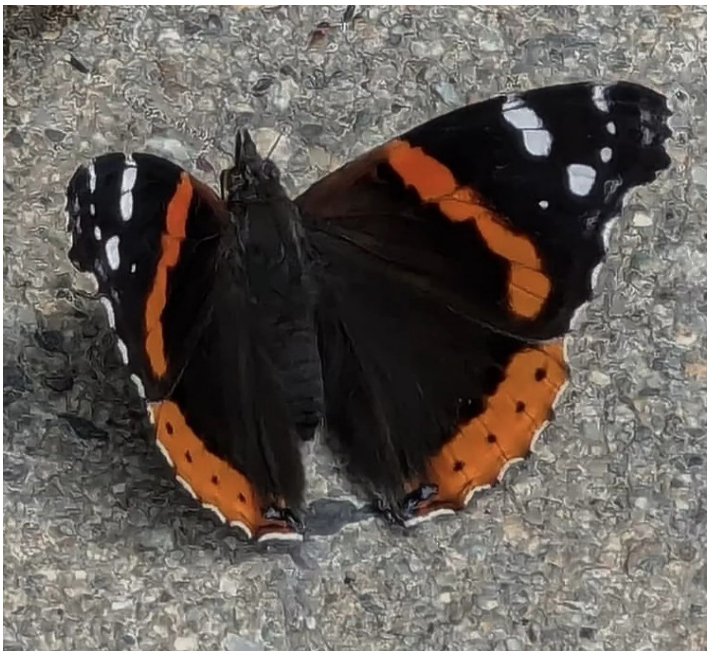

Fig 1. *Vanessa atalanta rubria* photographed on a roadside near Biche, Trinidad on 13 September 2024 (Hosein 2024).

Unless sightings in Trinidad become more frequent in the future, the most likely conclusion is that this species is a rare vagrant, and how it made its way to the island can only be speculated upon.

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