

Recent Data on Some Localised Trinidad Butterflies

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MY work in the oilfields first brought me to South America in early 1981. During my first posting to Venezuela, I became fascinated with the wealth of New World insect life. I moved to Trinidad in February 1982, just in time to observe the famous Trinidad wet-season butterflies.

Using "The Butterflies of Trinidad and Tobago" by Malcolm Barcant (1970) as my basic reference I decided to make a small collection. I have somewhat restricted my interests to the larger and mostly forest-dwelling species with emphasis on the families Papilionidae (Swallowtails or Pages), Brassolidae (Barks, Mort Bleus & Dynastors) and some of the more specialised Nymphalidae (Shoemakers).

With the onset of the rainy season it became quite apparent that many things have changed since Barcant published his book. I feel it may be useful to add some recent findings to supplement his work.

I must state now that my present knowledge of many species is due to the invaluable background assistance of resident collectors such as John French, Felix Gomez and especially Scott Alston-Smith and Clive Urich.

THE PAPILIONIDAE:

Battus belus varus: This southern resident appears to have had an excellent year. Good numbers were observed on virtually every visit to the favoured habitat in Parrylands and South Forest Reserve throughout the wet season.

Battus lycidas: Though no specimens were caught, reasonable numbers were however observed in Parrylands, Forest Reserve and Grande Ravine. Often encountered flying with *belus varus*, they were much more wary and very seldom came down low. The iridescent bluish green sheen to the upperside of the wings is a diagonal field marker.

**Eurytides telesilaus*: The Southern White Page; A solitary specimen of this magnificent rarity was observed in September close to Grande Ravine. Trips to Catshill, Inniss Field, in August and September however failed to produce this species, or other rare Papilionidae, in this area considered a "stronghold" in the past.

**Eurytides protesilaus*: The Northern White Page; A single specimen was heard of from the Toco area in September, coming to water. This was considered unusual and probably a stray. I understand that Dr. M. Cock observed good numbers in August, at high elevation, close to the summit of El Tucuche. Its apparent host-plant is *Phoebe elongata* (unpublished data, Mr. Barcant) but although searches were made no caterpillars have been found in recent years.

**Eurytides pausanias*: The Pausanias; This is another very localised Trinidad species, however Mr. Felix Gomez has captured

at least two male specimens this year in the Fondes Amandes area.

THE NYMPHALIDAE:

Probably the most interesting events of this season were the discovery of breeding localities for two of Trinidad's rarest Nymphalids: *Catonephile acontius* (The Orange Banded Shoemaker) and *Archeoprepona meander* (The Dark Banded King Shoemaker). *Anaea eribotes*, another rare and localised species was also located.

Anaea eribotes: The Scarce Blue Shoemaker: A chance finding of a female of this species laying eggs (in the Parrylands district) provided myself and C. Urich the opportunity to rear this uncommon butterfly in captivity. The host-plant was a species of "Candle Bush," still to be positively identified. This plant grows in dense secondary forests in the South and possesses only very small "candle" flowers. The butterfly shows a distinct preference for laying on small plants, on the underside of the leaf, and remarkably low to the ground.

Anaea morvus. The Blue Shoemaker: Though very few adult specimens were observed, many caterpillars were found on the host plant, *Ocotea glomerata*, in the Southgate area of Forest Reserve, and successfully raised. Mr. C. Urich is at present rearing a southern caterpillar on the northern food-plant, an interesting experiment which looks likely to succeed.

Archeoprepona meander: The Dark Banded King Shoemaker: A little luck led to the discovery of the host-plant. Taking a few caterpillars from the plant *Phoebe elongata* (and assuming them all to be the more common species *A. amphimachus*, the Banded King Shoemaker), I was pleasantly surprised to find that I had reared both species. There are distinct differences in the larval stage which I list below. These differences become more obvious after the second skin shedding.

A. meander: Few body markings and very pale overall. Black and white tails. Plain brown head.

A. amphimachus: Overall darker and more strongly marked. Black and Pink tails. "V" mark on front of head.

Both caterpillars are typically "King Shoemaker" in their overall appearance, being smooth-skinned, hunch-backed, possessing twin tails and two small head horns. (See also Papworth, 1981-82). This is the first time, to my knowledge, that *A. meander* has been reared in Trinidad.

Archaeoprepona demophoon: The Silver King Shoemaker: Though a reasonably well known species I take this opportunity to list its host-plant in the South. This is *Ocotea glomerata*, the same plant as for *Anaea morvus*.

Catonephile acontius: The Orange Banded Shoemaker: This is listed by Barcant as one of the twelve rarest butterflies in Trinidad and Tobago. He rightly assumed it to be a resident breeding species, though never proven in his day. Scott Alston-Smith deserves the credit for this new knowledge of the species. Whilst the butterfly was seen and recognised by myself, Scott Alston-Smith independently came across the same locality a few days later and located the host-plant complete with eggs and

*In Barcant (1970) these butterflies are listed under the name *Graphium*.

caterpillars. This same locality in Parrylands has proved very productive for the whole season.

Scott, myself and Clive Urich all bred out caterpillars. Urich tried captive mating but was unsuccessful in his first attempt, he was however successful in getting captured females already fertile, to lay in captivity.

The foodplant *Alchornea triplinervia* (Euphorbiaceae) is the same as that of *C. numelia*, The Grecian Shoemaker, from the Northern Range.**

Metamorphia epaphus: The Rusty-Tipped Page. This previously very rare butterfly can now be found regularly at high altitude in the Northern Range especially at Lalaja.

THE BRASSOLIDAE

The rare *Catoblepia berecynthia*, Brown Mort Bleu, appears to be more common now. Several specimens were baited to traps in the Parrylands area and individual specimens were also caught on the wing in Forest Reserve, Catshill, and, by Felix Gomez, in the Cascade area near Port of Spain.

Large numbers of the "Barks" *Opsiphanes cassiae* and *O. cassina* were taken in traps all season especially in Parrylands and Southgate, Forest Reserve along with *Caligo eurilochus*, the Forest Mort Bleu.

C. berecynthia apparently lays very easily in captivity on Ornamental Palm (C. Urich).

THE SATYRIDAE

The very rare species *Antirrhoea philoctetes* (The Queen

of the Night) has been captured in some numbers by Felix Gomez in the Cascade area. He finds them attracted to dense shade where there is fallen cocoa. Very little appears to be known of the life history of this species (Trinidad's rarest Satyrid). It is hoped to study this butterfly in captivity soon. The caterpillar apparently eats dead, dry, palm leaves.

Help wanted. Please check your homes at night for the Black Dynastor (Living World 1981 82 Cover photo). or the Brown Dynastor, brown with creamy yellow spots but the same size and shape. The females show a habit of being attracted to light just after dusk. With a live female specimen Mr. Clive Urich would stand a very good chance of breeding the species in captivity and adding to the very limited world knowledge, of the early stages of this very rare, primitive family of butterflies.

REFERENCES

BARCANT M. 1970. *Butterflies of Trinidad and Tobago*. Collins.

PAPWORTH H. 1981 82. *Living World* pp. 4-8. A review of the Trinidad butterflies hitherto placed in the genus *Prepona*.

** See Matthew Cock's note on p. 35 of this issue. Ed.