



BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION SA Inc.

NEWSLETTER

No. 20: May, 2005.

The value of Stinging Nettles!

The larvae of one of our most attractive butterflies **The Australian Admiral *Vanessa itea*** has a fondness for one of our most notorious weeds, the stinging nettle.

This butterfly is mostly confined to Australia, but has managed to disperse itself on upwelling westerly winds to the islands east of Australia, including New Zealand where this butterfly was first documented by European naturalists. It has the interesting habit of resting head downwards with wings open (usually) on vertical walls of buildings, fences, tree trunks, rock faces, etc. It will also slowly open and close its wings while remaining in this position, which usually indicates it is aware of your presence.

Description

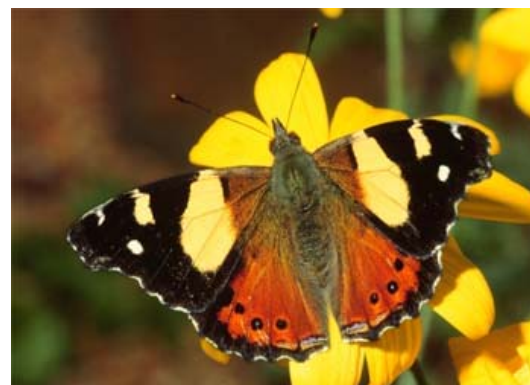
Wingspan: males and females: 50mm.

Upperside: Both sexes look very much alike with black, yellow and orange-brown colours. The yellow is in a band across the forewing, there are a series of blue-centred black dots on the bottom of the hind wing.

Underside: The forewing is similar to the upperside but the background colour is grey, and there is a blue ring near the leading edge. The hind wing ground colour is brownish-black mottled with grey.

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Class: Insecta
Order: Lepidoptera
Family: Nymphalidae
Genus: *Vanessa*
Species: *itea*



All photos: RHFisher

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Inside this issue:

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BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION SA Inc. for membership enquiries and annual membership payments (\$10):
Treasurer, 13/4 Randolph Avenue, PARKSIDE. 5063

The value of stinging nettles (Australian Admiral) continued

Distribution

This species is found on mainland Australia, Tasmania and a number of other nearby islands. In South Australia it is usually found in the temperate southern parts, but is sometimes seen in northern pastoral areas. .

Larval Foodplants

The larvae feed on plants in the nettle family, including both native (*Urtica incisa* native stinging nettle) and the introduced annual (*Urtica urens*). It will also feed on *Parietaria debilis* (soft nettle), but in many areas this plant is being displaced by weeds.

Habitat and Ecology

The Australian Admiral is a strong flyer and can be encountered in the most unlikely places within its range and seemingly kilometres from the host plants on which its larvae survive. In the southern half of Australia and occurs in a variety of temperate eucalypt open-forests. Especially wherever the larval food plants, *Urtica* sp grow in damp gullies or slopes, or along banks of creeks and rivers. It is also common in suburban and horticultural areas where it has adapted to the introduced *U. urens* (stinging nettle), and *Soleirolia soleirolii* (baby's tears).



Photo: Roger Grund Native stinging nettle *Urtica incisa*

Flight Period

It is possible to find the butterfly in flight throughout the year, but it is most common in the warmer months. In southern areas adults tend to hibernate during winter. It is also capable of continuous broods if its foodplant remains green, a brood being produced in about 7 weeks during summer.



Threats

No major threats in South Australia

Conservation

Considered common although many are rarely seen at one time. It is usually found near its food plants, unless migrating.

Compiled from Roger Grund's website "Butterflies of South Australia"

PROFILE: Lee Heard

For the past 14 years Lee Heard has worked for the Department for Environment and Heritage coordinating a team working on native vegetation surveys, native vegetation mapping and vegetation data capture focusing on the agricultural region of the state. Through this work Lee has travelled to many wonderful areas of the state (including areas in the far north) and savoured many habitats, her particular favourites being temperate grasslands and grassy woodlands (where they haven't been totally degraded or invaded – some gems do remain!). Encouraged by friends who indulge in the world of butterflies, the desire to have more butterflies in the garden and by local butterfly phenomena like the Caper White at the Waite Arboretum, Lee has joined Butterfly Conservation SA in an attempt to learn some more about these beautiful creatures.



Five years of Pollard Walk Butterfly Monitoring 'the tricks and trends'

For those of you I haven't met I am Bryan Haywood and I work for the Department for Environment and Heritage in Mt Gambier, as an adviser to landholders on bushland management and biodiversity conservation. Since November 1999, I have been running a butterfly monitoring project in the Penambol Conservation Park using a technique called the Pollard Walk. This technique as I understand is being used in the Mount Lofty Ranges for a similar project (through Neil Collier). Each week from early November to the end of April I take people out for a guided walk to learn about our local butterflies. I and all the participants have had loads of fun learning about butterflies and we've collected some interesting information which I'd like to share with you.

Butterflies you will see along our Pollard Walk

The most abundant is the Common brown, Klug's xenica, Shouldered Brown and Barred Grass-skipper during different parts of the season. Painted Lady, Admiral, Grass Blue, Caper White, Wanderer, Salt-bush Blue and Cabbage White have all been recorded but generally in small numbers throughout most of the season. Skippers are my favourite and we have 3 regionally rare species in the Orange and Splendid Ochre's and the Bright Shield-skipper. 14 species in all have been recorded along our 1.3km trail.

What time of year can you see them

The beauty of our walk is that all (but a few) of the above butterflies can be seen in January/February with the first beginning to emerge in Spring time. Painted Lady and Admiral are normally the first but are shadowed by the abundant Common Brown which has many males by late November/December. In some years when the Capers Whites are migrating we may see them in October/November for a few weeks. Closely following the Common Brown in December is the Klug's Xenica which has a rapid spike then a slow decline by February. Our skippers can be seen almost any time during the monitoring season but Orange Ochre is seen first, then by late Summer/Autumn the Barred Grass-skipper (Figure 1) and Bright Shield-skipper become common. The Shouldered Brown (Figure 2) appears later, emerging in March to be abundant by early April, but soon disappears by late April.

Best Weather Conditions for observing/counting

Observing butterflies is best undertaken on a cloudless day with little wind, even on cool days (< 20 degrees) ! So avoid, windy, hot and cloudy days as most species go into hiding.

Distinguishing features of some species

The skippers found along our walk are easy to identify in the field. All have their own unique colours, size and markings. We developed a field ID sheet to help with picking the differences between them which has provided some valuable assistance.

The browns are a little harder with the male common brown and both sexes of the Shouldered Brown being very similar both in flight and colouring. However, the benefit of understanding their life cycle and flight period is that male Common Brown is normally absent on the walk by the time the fresh Shouldered Brown begins to emerge.

Signage

Signs have been erected (Figure 3) this year to direct visitors to the walk from Mt Gambier. Also once on the walk, we have section markers positioned along the trail to break the walk up into 7 different habitats/sections. This assists us in understanding which habitat each species prefers.

Further information contact: Bryan Haywood, Bush Management Adviser, SE 8735 1143.

Bryan Haywood



Fig 1: Male Barred Grass Skipper
Dispar compacta



Fig 2: Male Shouldered Brown
Heteronympha penelope maraia
Tindale



Fig 3: new signs to the 'Butterfly Walk'
All Photos: Bryan Haywood

**Spring-Summer-Autumn 2004-2005;
Field and other notes by D.A (Andy) Young,
R.S.D 330 Newlands Service, via Kingscote, 5223:**

During the spring, summer and autumn of 2004-2005, I have been continuing various study projects that I had commenced the previous summer and have made several field trips throughout the state. I also made a very interesting visit to the Northern Territory in February 2005 and will follow this trip up with another in May. Here's an overview of some of my studies and activities:

Kangaroo Island:

Last spring was a particularly warm one on Kangaroo Island and the butterfly activity was correspondingly prolific. Because of the warm conditions, earlier emergence of spring butterfly species was noted. Two cases in point were the Small Bronze Azure, *Ogyris otanes*, which was first noted on the 15th October 2003, while it was first observed on the 10th October 2004. Examples of the Pt Ellen colony of the Black and White Skipper, *Antipodia atralba*, which were noted until around the 20th of November in 2003, and through egg emergence data were presumed to have been flying even later, were only observed on the 9th November this season. By the 11th November 2004, Black and White Skipper eggs were observed, but no adults could be found. Eggs collected of this species in 2003 hatched early in December (3rd to 9th). Wild eggs continued to be noted during fieldwork conducted at Pt. Ellen on the 13th December 2003, whereas this season's eggs started hatching in mid-November and all larvae were hatched and established by very early December. It has been established that the hatching time of eggs of this species is 15 days (Grund, 1999) and I have confirmed this observation with my own breeding experiments. This gives one a good measure of when the eggs were laid and therefore when the adults were flying.

An interesting note was the discovery of a colony of the Black and White Skipper at the "Little Sahara" Heritage area, approximately 7km east of Vivonne Bay. This colony is of a very large size, which is unusual for this species, the confirmed size being roughly 2km X 500m. The butterfly is breeding on the sedge, *Gahnia deusta*. 3rd and 4th instar larvae were located during the time adults were flying in December. During a follow up field trip during mid-March, no adults of any skippers were noted, but during an intensive search on the 28th March a single viable egg and a freshly metamorphosed pupa were located during a 7 hour period. This would suggest that a low density emergence of this butterfly occurs at this time of year. The area has not been burned since early in the 1950's. It has been noted that the species is "generally rare and very local, but may be common for a few years after fire" (Braby, 2004). The fact that the species was quite prolific in the colonised area, with over 100 observations on the day of highest activity (the 14th November), is therefore of interest.

Other Hesperinae species observed in the same general area were- the Variable Sedge-skipper, *Hesperilla donnysa*, the Golden-haired Sedge-skipper, *Hesperilla chrysotricha cyclopsila* and the Large Brown Skipper, *Motasingha trimaculata*. The single observation of the Golden-haired Sedge-skipper was of a female. It was noted paying attention to a patch of *Gahnia deusta* plants in the open heath areas. I captured it and confined it over this plant species. It laid an egg on the *G. deusta* just before dying, which probably confirms that *G. deusta* is a low preference foodplant for this butterfly, as Roger Grund mentions on his web-site. Unfortunately the egg was lost when it dropped off its substrate during transfer to a potted foodplant, so further conclusions cannot be drawn.

The Large Brown Skipper, *Motasingha trimaculata*, were again noted in reasonable numbers in the central south coast of Kangaroo Island this season, with the first adult noted on the 11th November and the last, a female noted in lightly worn condition, on the 19th December.



Photo: DA Young
Antipodia atralba upperside

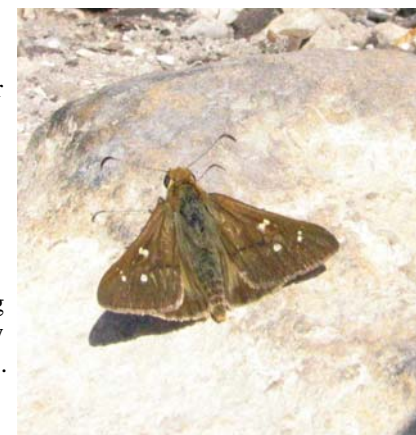


Photo: DA Young
Motasingha trimaculata upperside



Photo: DA Young
Motasingha trimaculata eggs

WEBSITE ADDRESSES: 'Butterflies of South Australia' <http://www.chariot.net.au/rgrund/index.htm>
BCSA <http://www.chariot.net.au/BCSA/index.htm>

The Blotched Blue, *Candalides acasta*, was noted in moderate numbers in an expanded area this spring. During 2003 the butterfly was noted in the lower Harriet area of Vivonne Bay and it was noted in this area again this spring on numerous occasions. Further locations were found for the butterfly; by myself at the junction of the Hickman Road with the South Coast Road and the "Little Sahara", and by Mr. Axel Kallies about 12km east of the West End Highway, along the Church Road, in December.

This suggests that the butterfly is widespread, or is becoming widespread, in the south-central portion of the Island, in heathy vegetation supporting *Cassytha glabella*, the foodplant.

Numbers of the Western Dusky-blue, *Candalides hyacinthina simplex*, were quite strong this spring, but the mid-summer hatching of the species that has been prominent in previous years, was only slightly evident this year. I have shown that this summer hatching breeds only on *Cassytha peninsularis* growing on a *Melaleuca lanceolata* host and not on the same plant parasitising *Melaleuca uncinata*.



Photo: DA Young *Candalides hyacinthina simplex*

Some other observations were of the large numbers of the migratory species, the Small Grass-yellow, *Eurema smilax*, and the Lesser Wanderer, *Danaus chrysippus*, which made it to the Island during the large-scale migratory events this spring. During late September 2004, I noted a large number of Lesser Wanderers at Pink Bay, near Cape Willoughby, the eastern tip of the Island. I noted more than 8 individuals at a time when walking along a fire trail at this location in September, and the butterflies were observed in numbers while driving through this area. Small Grass-yellows were particularly prominent on the north coast of the Dudley Peninsular and around the Kingscote airport in early and mid-September, though several examples of both species were noted at Vivonne Bay on the south-central coast, during the same period of time. By contrast, the large-scale migratory event involving the Caper White butterfly, *Belenois java teutonia*, was only observed from an isolate specimen or two at Vivonne Bay. I noted this species in large numbers during fieldwork in late November and early December at both Adelaide and the Ngarkat National Park in the Upper-Southeast. It must be mentioned that I didn't do any fieldwork on the north coast or on the Dudley Peninsular at this time, so more specimens may well have crossed to the Island.



Photo: DA Young *Ogyris otanes*

Local resident, Mr. David Hamdorf, related a final note of interest to me. Dave, who operates a Crayfish wholesale business at Vivonne Bay, is a keen observer of nature. In conversation with the crew of a fishing boat, who work off the south coast of Kangaroo Island, he was told of a Common Brown male, *Heteronympha merope*, observed at least 26km southeast of Cape Gantheume, the most southerly point of Kangaroo Island, during mid-November. If correct, this was a significant observation, as this is normally a species quite specific to its open woodland environment. One can speculate on the mechanisms of colonisation when one takes a record such as this into consideration.



Andy Young

Photo: DA Young
Male and female *Danaus chrysippus*
Lesser Wanderer

Next newsletter **Mt Bryan /Riverland trip**

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

8th August, 2005, at 7.30pm

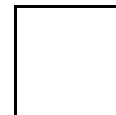
URRBRAE WETLANDS RESOURCE CENTRE Cross Roads, Urrbrae

Guest Speaker: to be advised but it is bound to be interesting!

Bring your friends and family and a plate of supper.

FEES NOW DUE

Many thanks to those members who have paid in advance. This caused some confusion last year as some members had forgotten they had already paid and our notice was not very clear. This year, if there is a cross in the box to the right, your fees are now due. Fees are still \$10 per annum, to Treasurer Lois Hasenohr, 13/4 Randolph Avenue, PARKSIDE 5063. You may pay up the three years in advance.



If you receive your newsletter by **email** you will receive an additional email (in due course once we have worked out a system!!) advising your fees are due.

EXCURSIONS PLANNED

Several excursions are planned for October/November including one to the Fleurieu Peninsula, details will be included in the next newsletter or check out our own BCSA website for information.

NEWSLETTER VIA EMAIL

If you would like to receive your newsletter via email as a PDF please contact the Secretary Jan Forrest at janfhm@senet.com.au. The advantage of receiving your newsletter via email is that it is ALL in colour, not just the front page. You then have to print it off yourself of course! Some people do not wish to receive their newsletter by email but are happy to receive special notices. If you currently do not receive notices (there have not been many) by email please respond to Jan Forrest as above with your email address.



Thanks for members who helped out at the Australian Plant Society Plant sale 30th April—1st May at Wayville. There were lots of enquiries

BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION SA Inc.

Chairman: Roger Grund

Secretary and Newsletter Editor: Jan Forrest OAM C/- South Australian Museum, North Terrace, ADELAIDE, 5000 ph (08) 82077503.

email < forrest.jan@saugov.sa.gov.au >

Treasurer : Lois Hasenohr , 13/4 Randolph Avenue, PARKSIDE. 5063

OUTREACH PROGRAM

The full exhibition and AO size panels from the Exhibition “Where have all the Butterflies gone?” are available from Jan Forrest at the South Australian Museum for use by Landcare and other Conservation groups at seminars, conferences and workshops or just for display. Included are five introductory panels, and seventeen panels from seven habitat areas: Coastal, Grasses, Mallee, Urban, Migration/Vagrant, Eucalyptus Forrest/Woodland, Arid, Wetland and Lower South East.

DIARY DATES

MEETINGS -

Committee meetings are held **bi-monthly** (usually the second Monday of the month) at 6.00pm in the Urrbrae Wetlands Resource Centre, Cross Roads, Urrbrae. All members are welcome to attend. If you would like further information or receive an agenda please contact the Secretary Jan Forrest at the address above.

WEB SITES

‘Butterfly Conservation SA Inc.’ <http://www.chariot.net.au/~bcsa/index.htm>

‘South Australian Butterflies’ <http://www.chariot.net.au/~rgrund/index.htm>

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS:

**A.D. PACE
JAKKI JAYNE
M.R. PACKER
JOHN BASSETT
LORNA McINTYRE**

