

different type of locality, where an isolated piece of acid heath-land of perhaps only ten acres will show the observer some hundreds of these insects fighting for possession of the flower-heads of the Meadow Thistle (a local plant apparently preferred to the Dwarf Thistle which is normally the chief attraction as this fritillary careers over the Downs). Of the third member of this group, the High Brown Fritillary, I can say little except to regret, from what I hear and read, that it has become much scarcer in recent years and has certainly died out in many of its former localities. Personally, I have not seen it for many years, but, while I was at Eton, all that was necessary was a bicycle ride to Windsor Great Park, where it was always to be found in numbers gliding over the Bracken, almost impossible to catch until it found a wet spot with a good stand of Marsh Thistles. It is difficult to conclude what are the ecological reasons for its present decline, but I suspect that, as it is essentially a butterfly of extensive woodland clearings, it is now deprived of much of its former habitat through the planting of quick-profit Conifers. So possibly yet another of our finest species is in process of being sacrificed to the god of greed.

(To be continued)

UNUSUAL FOODPLANT OF *MELITAEA CINXIA* L. — On April 6th 1976, while visiting a strong colony of *M. cinxia* in West Wight started by my husband several years ago, I found a number of half grown larvae feeding on the grasses *Dactylis glomeratus* and *Bromus erectus*. The colony is on a cliff top in an exposed position and extends over an area of 50 yards x 800 yards approximately. In the same year some of the permanent stock of larvae in our flight cages were also feeding on a grass — *Poa pratensis*, and this occurred again in 1977. The only other reference to this species feeding on grass that I know of is Wilkes' *English Moths and Butterflies* (1747-50) wherein it is stated the "Caterpillar hereof feeds on Plantain Clover, and Grass, changes to a Chrysalis, within a Web of its own spinning, upon the surface of the Ground, at the beginning of May and the Fly appears fourteen days after. The Caterpillars are sociable, and feed together. They appear of a very timorous Nature for if you move the food on which they are, they immediately quit their hold and fall to the ground, and there remain in a curled up form still such time as they think the danger over. The Butterfly is swift in flight but may be taken if diligently attended to in fields of Hay Grass at the time above mentioned". Wilkes obviously observed *cinxia* thoroughly through its complete life cycle, as his illustration shows the larvae on grass, the pupa on plantain and the adult in flight. Incidentally, his dating is wrong in as much as the calender was changed a few years after the book was published. — AMANDA WATSON, F.R.E.S., F.R.H.S., Watson Trust for Entomology, Porcorum, Sandy Down, Boldre, Lymington, Hants.



Watson, Allan. 1979. "Unusual foodplant of *Melitaea cinxia* L." *The entomologist's record and journal of variation* 91, 233-233.

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