

BUTTERFLIES ON EL HIERRO

By DENIS F. OWEN,* DAVID A.S. SMITH and ALLISTER G. SMITH

El Hierro, the smallest of the Canary Islands, has an area of only 278 km² and a maximum elevation of 1500 m. Like the other outer Canaries it is volcanic and, despite its small size, is enormously varied in vegetation, a feature associated with dramatic local differences in rainfall and (especially) cloud formation. There is laurel forest on the northern slopes above El Golfo and extensive *Pinus canariensis* forest on the south side of the central mountainous plateau. Much of the south and west of the island is volcanic desert with a sparse vegetation unsuitable for most butterflies, except in the towns and villages where garden flowers and crops attract a few species. Grassy meadows, chiefly in the north-east, support a huge population of *Maniola jurtina* and smaller numbers of other species.

We visited El Hierro in June 1987 essentially to examine variation in *Maniola jurtina* and to check for the possible presence of *Pararge xiphioides*. We found only nine species of butterflies and record them because few entomologists seem to have visited the island mainly, we suspect, because compared to other islands in the Canaries, it is relatively impoverished.

Artogeia rapae (L.). Small white. Frequent near cultivation, less common elsewhere. One larva was found on an alien *Reseda* sp along with three larvae of *Pontia daplidice*. Many pupae were found in a Valverde town garden attached to the leaves of a native shrub, *Rumex lunaria*, having recently fed on a nearby alien, *Tropaeolum majus*. Larvae were also found on cultivated *Brassica oleracea*.

Pontia daplidice (L.). Bath white. Widespread and often the only butterfly in arid habitats; less frequent among cultivation and at well-vegetated sites. Larvae in all instars common on alien *Reseda* spp.

Lycaena phlaeas. Small copper. Chiefly in ones and twos and common only in open *Pinus canariensis* forest.

Aricia agestis cramera Eschscholtz. Brown argus. Four seen, all in grassy places chiefly inhabited by *Maniola jurtina*. This is possibly the first record for the island as it is not listed by Higgins and Riley (1983).

Vanessa atalanta (L.). Red admiral. One in a garden at Valverde. Throughout the Canaries this species is far less common than *Vanessa indica* and is nearly always seen in towns and gardens.

Vanessa indica calliroe Hübn. Indian red admiral. Widespread except in very arid areas and particularly common in laurel forest above El Golfo where females were observed laying on *Urtica morifolia*, the

*2 Shelford Place, Headington, Oxford OX3 7NW.

dominant understorey plant in the forest. Eggs are laid on the upperside of terminal leaves, usually singly but one female three times laid two eggs side by side. Larvae in all stages were abundant on *Urtica moriflora* growing in deep shade.

Cynthia cardui (L.). Painted lady. In ones and twos in most habitats except laurel forest and extremely arid areas. A larva and two pupae were found on an unidentified alien thistle.

Maniola jurtina hispulla Esper. Meadow brown. Both males and females were abundant in grassy areas, often sheltering from the wind in gulleys and hollows. The grass was mostly dead and the butterflies had evidently been out for some weeks. No mated pairs were seen and a high proportion of males was worn and old. Females were seen entering *Pinus canariensis* forest, possibly to aestivate, but also feeding from flowers, particularly the labiate, *Micromeria varia*.

Danaus plexippus (L.). Monarch. Eggs, larvae and pupae were common on *Gomphocarpus fruticosus*, a shrubby African milkweed grown in Valverde as an ornamental, and apparently not previously recorded on El Hierro (David Bramwell *in litt.*). Adult butterflies were seen in the towns of Pinar and Frontera, confirming the view that in the Canary Islands this is essentially a town species.

A "blue" was seen, probably a long-tailed blue, *Lampides boeticus* (L.), as the Canary blue, *Cycliurus webbianus* Brullé, is not recorded from El Hierro (Higgins and Riley 1983). We were probably too early in the year for *Pseudotergumia wyssi bacchus* Higgins, a subspecies of the Canary grayling confined to the islands of El Hierro and La Gomera. A special search was made for the speckled wood, *Pararge xiphioides*, reported as absent from El Hierro, and we reached the conclusion that although the laurel forest looks suitable, there is not enough grass, the ground layer being dominated by *Urtica morifolia*. After we left the island we spent three days on Tenerife and easily found nineteen species of butterflies, a striking reminder of the faunistic impoverishment of El Hierro.

Reference

Higgins, L.G. and Riley, N.D. 1983. *A field guide to the butterflies of Britain and Europe*. Collins, London.

Correction

In our note on *Cis dentatus* which was published in the recent issue of the *Ent. Rec.* (100: 188) we have very regrettably referred to Mr E.W. Aubrook as deceased. In this we have been totally mistaken and we would like to offer our sincere apologies to Mr Aubrook and to his family and friends for any distress we may have caused by our error. I.S. CARTER, 165 Leckhampton Road, Cheltenham, Glos. GL53 0AD and J.A. OWEN, 8 Kingsdown Road, Epsom, Surrey KT17 3PU.



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