

THE LEPIDOPTERA OF THE EGMONT NATIONAL PARK

Dr. K. J. FOX,

Box 23, Manaia, Taranaki.

PART II. BUTTERFLIES

The butterfly fauna of Mt. Egmont is poor both in numbers of species present, and indeed numbers of individuals of these species that are usually seen. None of the migrant species frequently reported in Taranaki have been recorded inside the National Park, despite its proximity to the most western coasts of the North Island.

Two species that breed in the Tongariro National Park only some eighty miles away have not been found on Egmont, namely **Dodonidia helmsi** Fered., and **Lycaena boldenarum** White. The latter species, the smaller boulder butterfly is reported in the chapter on insects by J. T. Salmon in the Egmont Park Handbook (1964 and 1970) as frequenting stream beds. Eight years collecting in the area have failed to confirm the presence of **Lycaena boldenarum**, and careful searching for larvae and adults of **Dodonidae helmsi** have met with no success. I conclude that both these species are absent from Mt. Egmont.

The three South Island mountain butterflies, namely **Argyroprenga antipodum** Dbld; (The Tussock Butterfly), **Percnodaimon pluto** Fereday, and **Erebiola butleri** Fered., are absent from Mt. Egmont.

Two species—The Monarch Butterfly (**Danaus plexippus** Linn.) and The Cabbage White Butterfly (**Pieris rapae** Linn.) are occasional visitors to the area and have been seen near the mountain houses, and in the Pukeiti and Kaitake areas as well as on the edges of the reserve.

The following four species are found regularly in the National Park and breed there:—

Vanessa gonerilla Fabr.

This species, the New Zealand Red Admiral, is common throughout the area in the summer months. It is particularly common in the bush up to 3500', but is a very strong flier and has been recorded on hot days flying at all altitudes and even around the summit at 8260'.

Vanessa itea Fabr.

The Yellow Admiral is occasionally seen in the bush and on the mountain tracks up to about 3000', but is never as common as the Red Admiral. It is however abundant in the Pukeiti area and in the Kaitake Ranges.

Zizeeria otis labradus Godt.

The New Zealand Common Blue is abundant throughout the area on the edge of roads and tracks up to 4000' where its food-plants abound. It is particularly common in March.

Lycaera salustius Fabr.

The Common Copper is found throughout the area in the summer months and is frequently seen flying in the tussock up to 5000'.

PART III. HEPIALIDAE

The Hepialidae of the Egmont region are of great interest. Apart from one sub-alpine species which is found in the North Island only on Mt. Egmont, namely **Dioxycanus oreas**, there is also a montane species, **Aoraia leonina**, which is found in the North Island only on Mt. Egmont and Mt. Ruapehu. The distribution of the Hepialidae of New Zealand has been discussed in full by Dumbleton (N.Z. Journal of Science, Vol. 9, No. 4, Dec. 66). Another large Hepialid—**Trioxycanus characterifera**—occurs on Mt. Egmont at around the 3000' level and it could be the larvae of any of the above three species, or perhaps the larvae of all of them, which are parasitised by the fungus **Cordiceps robertsii**, and give rise to the vegetable caterpillars for which Egmont is famous.

Aenetus virescens (Doubleday)

This handsome species—the “puriri” moth—is the largest New Zealand moth, and is found in great abundance on Mt. Egmont at all levels up to 4000'. In an average night's collecting during the emergence period one sees about three hundred males attracted to a mercury vapour bulb in two hours, and if one is lucky perhaps one female. The largest female seen had a wing expanse of 14cms.

The ground colour is usually bright green but specimens have been recorded with the ground colour being whitish, silvery or even bright yellow.

The date of emergence is remarkably constant for a given altitude, and in Taranaki specimens have been captured from August through to January. The species first emerges at sea level from the middle to the end of August, and emerges in the plains surrounding Mt. Egmont in September. It first appears in the bush on Mt. Egmont at about 1500' in early October, has reached the 2500' level by mid November and is not seen in any numbers at 3000' until Christmas. It is found at 4000' in early January.

There is thus a direct relationship between altitude and emergence period, or in other words, the colder and wetter the environment the later the emergence.

Aoraia leonina (Philpott)

This species is known only from Mts. Egmont and Ruapehu in the North Island, and from the northern part of the South Island. The males are freely attracted to light, and their flight period does

not start until an hour after dark. Only two females have been found to date. These were both found at rest—one in a clump of **Hebe** at 4200', and one on 17.3.71 sitting on the summit rock of Mt. Egmont 8260', which subsequently laid fertile eggs. The reason for this "summit seeking" is unknown, but is a common phenomenon with insects of all groups on Mt. Egmont. This is a large species and the females have a wing expanse of 9.5cms.

Records are: South Egmont 3100' 1.3.71 (5 males) F. Chambers; 9.3.71 (2 males) F. Chambers; East Egmont 4000' 11.3.71 (1 female, over 50 males) K. J. Fox; 30.3.71 (1 male) F. Chambers.

Trioxycanus enysii (Butler)

This species is recorded by Salmon in the Egmont Park Handbook, but I have never seen it. However a friend, Mr. F. Chambers of Opunake has recorded it flying at dusk in the westernmost areas of the Park:—

Kahui Track 1500' 14.12.70 (2 males); 23.12.70 (2 males); 29.12.70 (1 male).

Trioxycanus characterifera (Walker)

This species has been recorded occasionally, but in very small numbers, close to the 3000' level:—

Records are: South Egmont 3100' 6.1.66 (1); 3.1.69 (1); 19.1.69 (1).

Dioxycanus oreas (Hudson)

This species is found on Mt. Egmont in the North Island—being otherwise known only from Mt. Arthur and Arthurs Pass in the South Island. It is common in the sub-alpine scrub zone around 4000' in late December and early January.

However, despite its abundance, I did not come upon this species until I had been collecting on Egmont for six years, as the flight period starts before dusk and finishes completely ten minutes after dark, and prior to this I had always started collecting just too late in the evening. Males are readily attracted to light females rarely.

Positive records: East Egmont 4000' 22.12.69 (42 males and 2 females) F. Chambers, K. J. Fox.

Wiseana cervinata (Walker)

Occasionally found where the bush meets farmland. South Egmont 1500' 26.11.64 (abundant); 28.10.65 (1). South Egmont 2800' 16.1.70 (1 male).

Wiseana signata (Walker)

Occasionally found at the bush edge in November. One record only from Mt. Egmont: South Side 3100' 14.1.70 (1 male).

Wiseana umbraculata (Guénée)

Frequently found at the bush edge in November.