

Notes on the distribution and abundance of *Bassaris itea* (Lepidoptera: Nymphalidae)

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15 Allen Terrace, Linden, Wellington

Hudson (1928) recorded *Bassaris itea* (Fabricius) (as *Vanessa itea*) from the North Island, and Nelson, Marlborough and Christchurch in the South Island. Likewise, Miller (1971) gives the distribution of this species as Northland to Canterbury. It is thus of some interest that a fresh specimen of *B. itea* was observed, on 5 February 1974, flying over *Festuca novae-zelandiae* grassland near Becks, Central Otago (NZMS 1—S125-461829). This is apparently the first record of this species in Otago.

Bassaris itea appears to have increased in numbers and range over the last 50 years. Hudson (1928) reported it as "usually rather scarce" in the Wellington area. Contrary to this, Gaskin (1966) recorded the species as very common in Wellington during 1963. Over the years 1968-1974 I have observed *B. itea* as often as *B. gonerilla* (Fabricius) at Linden in the Wellington area from January to May. However, *B. itea* is rarely seen from September to December, though *B. gonerilla* is common then, at Linden. A similar pattern of seasonal abundance in *B. itea* appears to occur in the Wairarapa (Hudson, 1950). It is of interest that three species of nymphalid butterfly greatly increased in abundance and extended their ranges in Britain in the period from 1930 onwards (Ford, 1967); the period during which *B. itea* has increased in abundance in the Wellington area.

It seems possible that a small resident population of *B. itea* in the southern North Island has been, and is still being, reinforced by summer migration from the northern North Island. Similarly, *B. itea* has a stable resident population in the warmer northern half of the South Island which has begun recently to extend its range southwards to Otago, but has yet to permanently establish itself there. Alternatively, *B. itea* may exist both as a resident and migratory species in New Zealand. *Bassaris itea* has been recorded among migratory flights of *Cynthia kershawii* (McCoy) in Australia (Common and Waterhouse, 1972). It is not inconceivable that in some years large numbers of *B. itea* migrate to New Zealand from Australia, increasing both the numbers and range of a small resident population.

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