

Behaviour pattern of Yellow Admiral Butterflies

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During the last week of April, I noticed that Yellow Admiral butterflies (*Bassaritis itea*, Lepidoptera: Nymphalidae) were flying from a *Buddleia* bush, where they were feeding, to rest with outspread wings in the sunshine on the ENE wall of our house. They settled upside down with the body inclined 10 to 20 degrees from the vertical line, i.e. with heads at the "7 or 8 o'clock" position. I counted 21 sightings of this behaviour involving 6 individuals, between 10 and 10.45 a.m.

At this time and site the sun was shining obliquely from their left side. When the sun went behind clouds for a few minutes, the butterflies settled at random, some with wings closed. But when the sun appeared again, they immediately spread their wings and shuffled around until they had aligned themselves as described. Occasionally they alighted on the corner of the house where the plane of the sun's rays was perpendicular to their spread wings. Their favoured position here was with head vertically downwards.

As the sunlight reached the front of the house, facing NNW, the butterflies settled there instead, but at right angles to their position on the ENE wall, i.e. they aligned themselves with heads at "4 or 5 o'clock" position. Here the sun was shining obliquely from their right side. When the sun came directly on to this wall, during the early afternoon, some of them settled with heads down. As the sun moved further west, most of them re-orientated to the "7 or 8 o'clock" position as once more the sun shone obliquely on their left side.

Confirmation of this behaviour was provided by J. W. Harding (pers. comm.), who observed a similar pattern with this species in another part of Nelson.

There were several other species of butterflies in the garden—Red Admirals, Monarch, Painted Lady, Little Blue, Long-tailed Blue, Copper, and Cabbage White, but none of these have been seen to show this behaviour.

I checked several times a day for the next 2 or 3 weeks, and almost always the same pattern of alignment was noted in Yellow Admirals.