

A large migration of the Australian meadow argus butterfly *Junonia villida calybe* (Lepidoptera; Nymphalidae) to southern New Zealand

A. C. HARRIS

Otago Museum, Great King Street, Dunedin, New Zealand

ABSTRACT

An account is given of the 1984 migration of *Junonia villida calybe* (Godart) to southern New Zealand.

Keywords: Migration, Lepidoptera, Nymphalidae, *Junonia villida calybe*, Australian meadow argus butterfly, southern New Zealand.

Gibbs (1980) noted that during the summer of 1886-7 “hundreds, probably many thousands” of meadow argus butterflies (*Junonia villida calybe* (Godart)) invaded New Zealand and that since then “spasmodic records of odd specimens” only have been made. He stated that it is “generally rare” in New Zealand. The immigration recorded here of late January-March 1984 would seem to have been the largest since records were kept.

The first 1984 record was that of an anonymous visitor to the Otago Museum who left a voucher specimen and a note stating that the butterflies appeared in large numbers on the southern West Coast about 27 January. Mr C. Wilson (pers. comm.) observed thousands of meadow argus butterflies between Jackson Bay and Abut Head, between 10-12 February 1984, with some mating and ovipositing on *Plantago* species. Dr R. R. Forster (pers. comm.) reported seeing 30-40 individuals in a small paddock about 15 m square near Haast, and stated that they were abundant during 12-22 February between Jackson Bay and Haast. Mrs P. Wistrand noted that from 20 February-4 March 1984, many thousands of meadow argus butterflies occurred between Jackson Bay and Karangarua River, a distance of about 170 km. Twenty to thirty individuals could be seen flying about her crib* near the Karangarua River mouth, and fed from *Angelica geniculata* (Forst.f.) flowers. Throughout February the butterflies were also repeatedly observed in Dunedin city. Between 7 February-12 March 15 specimens, captured throughout Otago-Southland by interested members of the public, were brought to the Otago Museum, and many telephone inquiries were received at the museum from people who had observed the butterflies in their gardens. Many observers (particularly on the West Coast) reported that the butterflies sought out gravel pits, quarries, roadsides and bare stony places.

Other species of Australian migratory butterflies brought to the Otago Museum in the first 3 months of 1984 included *Cynthia kershawi* KcKoy (4 specimens) and *Danaus Chrysippus petilia* (Stoll) (5 specimens).

(Note: de Lesse (1952), mainly on the basis of male genitalia and hind wing characters, showed that the genera *Junonia* Hübner and *Precis* Hübner are quite distinct, and that Hemming (1934) was incorrect in synonymising *Junonia* with *Precis*, from which it follows that *Junonia* Hbn. is the correct generic placement for *villida* (F.))

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REFERENCES

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