

Tenerife and Gomera, July 1978

By N. J. and A. C. DERRY *

(1) Tenerife

Tenerife is a small but, in parts, a very picturesque island, its outline being dominated by the towering pyramidal peak of Mount Teide (3,715 m). The Island supports areas of notable contrast, huge expanses of eastern, southern and western Tenerife being barren and entomologically unproductive, while much of the north and north-east has a more humid climate and so supports a comparatively diverse flora and fauna. Because of the dry atmosphere, the mountainous slopes of the central 'massif' are largely shrouded by pine woodland and relatively devoid of life; however, the northern slopes are more moist, affording a proliferation of understorey vegetation. The Island's biota has also been enriched by artificial influences such as the naturalization of plants and the provision of irrigation by which man has had a profound effect on the status of certain Lepidoptera, a good example being the recent colonisation by *Catopsilia florella* Fabricius of the environs of some of the major settlements in the north, north-east and south-west.

Based at Playa de las Americas in the south-west, the family spent an idyllic two weeks on Tenerife (July 19th to August 2nd). Having hired a Seat 133 for ten days, we urged it relentlessly along the web of roads covering the Island; however, it soon became apparent that large areas were entomologically destitute, the richest hunting grounds lying in the north (especially in the Orotava valley), the north-east, localized areas surrounding Pico de Teide, and the immediate neighbourhood of Playa de las Americas.

Below are brief accounts of observations made on the Rhopalocera encountered during our sojourn on Tenerife.

Pieris brassicae cheiranthi Hbn. Only met with in north and north-eastern Tenerife, especially in the Orotava valley, where leaves of *Tropaeolum majus* littered with larvae were commonly found and newly-formed pupae were also discovered. On July 25th a female imago was seen at 1,000 m, and on July 23rd three males and one female were encountered at a height of 1,500 m, both localities being in the mountains above La Orotava. Although it is likely that these specimens were quasi-migratory as no *Cruciferae* appeared to be present at either location, they occurred at somewhat higher altitudes than the limit specified by Higgins and Riley (1975, p. 43) ³.

Pieris rapae L. Widespread and common, primarily near human habitations, larvae being found in the Orotava valley both on *Tropaeolum majus* and *Brassica oleracea*. A few migratory specimens were seen at Las Canadas (2,100 m) on 22nd July.

Pontia daplidice L. Although present over a wide area, sightings were sporadic only, and mostly over rough, rocky ground.

* Limeburners, Iron Bridge, Shropshire.

Catopsilia florella L. Particularly abundant at Playa de las Americas, *Cassia didymobotyra* bushes in the area being literally smothered in ova and larvae. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to state that it was exceptional to find *Cassia* leaves that had not been spattered with the whitish, bottle-shaped ova. Although female *C. florella* are dimorphic, of the vast number seen only a few were of the yellow form, the latter bearing a particularly close resemblance to male *Gonepteryx rhamni* L. when on the wing. The larvae of *C. florella* also appear to be dimorphic, having a 'green' and a 'yellow' form, but the colour may be imparted by a substance in the larva's diet as, in our experience, the 'yellow' larvae tended to feed on the buds and petals of *Cassia* flowerheads, whereas the 'green' ones seemed to feed almost exclusively on the leaves. Both 'green' and 'yellow' larvae were reared and it appeared that the latter grew to a greater size, formed larger pupae and gave rise to female imagines, while predominantly male specimens emerged from the 'green' larvae. However, only a small number of adults were bred and the results obtained are thus by no means conclusive.

Colias crocea Geoff. Widely distributed and reasonably common in a number of different habitats. A small proportion of *C. crocea* f. *helice* were observed.

Gonepteryx cleopatra cleobule Hbn. Fresh and worn imagines were encountered in small numbers, both in the north-eastern tip of the Island and in the Orotava valley, from 600 to 1,500 m.

Danaus plexippus L. A predominantly low-altitude species which we came across in south-western and northern parts of the Island, especially in the vicinity of hotel gardens. From observing males at Playa de las Americas it was noticeable that each one seemed to have a regular flightpath, with flights sometimes continuing late into the evening, evidenced by sightings at 8 p.m. on July 20th and at 7 p.m. on July 22nd.

Danaus chrysippus L. There is a strong possibility that in the case of this species we were 'between broods', as repeated visits to favoured localities proved fruitless.

Vanessa atalanta L. Three scattered sightings only, in the mountains above La Orotava.

Vanessa indica vulcania Godart. Not uncommon, mainly in the Orotava valley and the north-eastern tip of Tenerife, most imagines being observed in mountainous areas (up to a height of 1,500 m), where they were invariably flying strongly.

Vanessa cardui L. Widespread; often locally common around flowers of the genus *Carduus* or *Cirsium*, especially at the head of the Orotava valley and on the Las Canadas plateau (at 2,100 m).

Vanessa virginiensis Drury. This proved to be a notable absentee, notwithstanding an intensive search of likely habitats, both on Tenerife and Gomera, and we would be interested to hear from anyone who has recently come across this species in the Canary Isles.

Pandoriana pandora D. & S. A few specimens only were seen: one north of Santa Cruz and six others in the mountains above La Orotava.

Pseudotergumia wyssii wyssii Christ. Several were 'put up' amongst light pine woodland at Las Canadas on July 22nd and, during the late afternoon of the same day, the species was found to be abundant in pine woodland at 1,500 m, on a south-facing mountain-side, some of the larger pines harbouring three or more imagines. It must be emphasised that very few *P. wyssii* were seen in flight, apart from those disturbed, except in the late afternoon of July 22nd when adults were flying freely, in complete shade, at 6 p.m.; this gives weight to the theory expounded by Guichard (Manley and Allcard, 1970, p. 132)⁴ that *P. wyssii* "flies chiefly before 9.30 p.m. and after 4.30 p.m., which we further corroborated by observations of *P. wyssii bacchus* on Gomera, although we did not witness any early morning flights.

Maniola jurtina hispulla Esp. Common in the north and north-eastern parts of the Island.

Pararge xiphioides Stdgr. A shade-loving species, of widespread occurrence, found to be most plentiful within banana groves to the north of Playa de las Americas.

Lycaena phlaeas L., *Aricia cramera* Eschscholtz and *Thymelicus acteon christi* Rebel. These three species have been grouped together as their distributions displayed remarkable similarity, being confined largely to the north and north-eastern tip of Tenerife, especially in the mountains above La Orotava.

Lampides boeticus L. Encountered widely, ranging from sea level to over 2,000 m (at Las Canadas).

Cyclyrius webbianus Brullé. Similar to *L. boeticus* in its distribution (implying that it too has a leguminous larval food-plant) and nowhere more abundant than at Las Canadas, where 'clouds' of the insect were disturbed. Here males seemingly outnumbered females, while at some sites at lower elevations there appeared to be a preponderance of females.

Zizeeria knysna Trimen. Locally very numerous in the vicinity of Playa de las Americas, but a longer stay on Tenerife might well have revealed colonies around Puerto de la Cruz and elsewhere.

(2) Gomera

Although based on Tenerife, we did venture beyond its shores, making two day-trips to the nearby Island of Gomera. These excursions, however, were not totally successful as we were hampered both by strong winds and low cloud; thus, while Gomera's coast was bathed in warm sunshine, the hills of the interior were enveloped by swirling fog. (A similar phenomenon was probably experienced by H. G. Allcard and A. Valletta when visiting the Mercedes mountains in September 1977).¹

We were thankful that such adverse conditions did not persist indefinitely during our visits to Gomera and in a temporary reprieve from the vindictive weather we noted the following species: *Pieris rapae* L.; *Pontia daplidice* L.; *Colias crocea* Geoff.; *Vanessa indica vulcania* Godart; *Vanessa cardui* L.; *Pandoriana pandora* D. & S.; *Maniola jurtina hispulla* Esp.; *Pararge xiphioides* Stdgr.; *Lampides boeticus* L.; *Cyclurius webbianus* Brullé; *Aricia cramera* Eschscholtz; *Thymelicus acteon christi* Rebel.

Gonepteryx cleopatra cleobule Hbn. Four males and two females were seen on Gomera, prompting a search of *Rhamnus* bushes in the vicinity, which proved unprofitable. The female specimens were certainly paler than their counterparts on Tenerife, virtually lacking the pale orange flush on the forewing.

Pseudotergumia wyssii bacchus Higgins. Seen commonly on rocky slopes and in vineyards over the northern part of Gomera. The imagines were surprisingly active in dull weather and tended to fly exceptionally late in the day, over twenty specimens being flushed from one particular hillside between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m., while nothing else stirred.

Unfortunately, during our time on Gomera we failed to acquire a glimpse of either of our main quarries, *V. virginiensis* and *D. chrysippus*, and the absence of these species occasioned the only regrets of an immensely enjoyable holiday. We were, nevertheless, somewhat surprised by the wealth and abundance of Tenerife's Rhopalocera; indeed, we were so successful early on that only one additional species (*V. atalanta*) was procured after July 23rd; thus the bulk of our time thereafter was concentrated on our quest for *V. virginiensis* and *D. chrysippus*. Does the fact that we failed in this particular venture necessitate a second expedition to gratify our entomological appetites?

References

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2. Gaydon, A. G., 1972. April Butterflies in Tenerife. *Bull. Amat. ent. Soc.*, **31**: 106.
3. Higgins, L. G., and Riley, N. D., 1970. *A Field Guide to the Butterflies of Britain and Europe*. Collins, London.
4. Manley, W. B. L., and Allcard, H. G., 1970. *A Field Guide to the Butterflies and Burnets of Spain*. E. W. Classey Ltd., Hampton.
5. Polunin, O., 1972. *The Concise Flowers of Europe*. O.U.P. London.
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OLIGIA VERSICOLOR (BORKH.) IN CO. DUBLIN. — On July 26th 1973 I caught an *Oligia* ♂ at M.V. trap at Lispopple, Co. Dublin. The specimen was determined by D. S. Fletcher of the British Museum (Natural History) as *Oligia versicolor* (Borkh.). In his "Revised Catalogue of Irish Macrolepidoptera" (1964), Baynes refers to only one other Irish record of this species, dating from 1903. I am not aware of any more recent record of this species in Ireland. — K. G. M. BOND, Lützowstrasse 4, 32 Hildesheim, West Germany.



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