

Summertime spells opportunities to explore the natural areas around our homes or the places that we visit. Sometimes when we are out and about we may see the colourful wings of a butterfly flicker past. However, our understanding of New Zealand's native butterflies is limited and they have only recently been studied in depth.

I trust these two pages will spark your interest to learn more about these fascinating "flying flowers" as Walt Disney called them. We've even included an interesting butterfly competition with first prize a 3-colour kiwi T-shirt such as Malvina is wearing in the photo to the right.

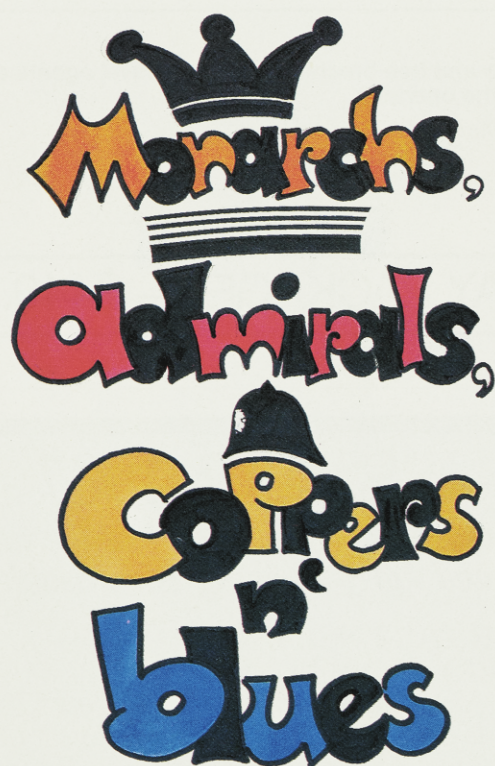
Choosing a title for this item on butterflies was fun . . . for

without a doubt our butterflies are regarded as the regal and commanding leaders of winged insects. They have also captured the eye of painters and photographers and the imaginations of so many poets and storytellers . . .

**I hope they capture your heart too . . .**

**Editor**

*Terry Fitzcarron*



There is a tale which tells of Aotearoa being inhabited by giant green butterflies with fluted wings. These butterflies bravely put out the molten fires of a huge volcanic eruption by smothering the burning embers of the forest with their wings. Sadly all of them perished in the flames. To this day, so the story goes, the memory of those brave butterflies lingers in the waving green fronds of the beautiful ponga tree ferns.

Butterflies, like most other insects, have six legs, two antennae or "feelers", two big eyes, and a body divided into 3 parts — head, thorax and abdomen. Their crowning glory is of course the two pairs of wings which grow from the thorax or middle section of the body. The wings are covered with rows of tiny coloured scales like tiles on a roof. This is why butterflies and moths are called *Lepidoptera* which means scaly-winged. Some of those scales may stick to your finger if you touch a butterfly's wing very gently. When a butterfly settles it usually folds its uppermost bright colours away and its undersides blend with the surroundings to help hide it from its enemies.

Despite the fact that there are many thousands of different species of butterflies throughout the world only 24 species are known to have lived in New Zealand. Of the 24 species, 12 are found only in New Zealand, two are common to both Australia and New Zealand and three have established themselves since European settlement. The remaining seven species do not breed here, but migrate from Australia.

One well known self-introduced butterfly is the elegant orange and black Monarch butterfly whose original home was in North America. They have been known to travel in swarms for thousands of miles darkening the sun in their path. Monarchs lay their eggs on plants with milky sap, such as a swan plant. After about five days the eggs hatch into tiny caterpillars which quickly grow, moulting their skin several times. Two weeks later they become fat tiger-coloured caterpillars about 5cm long. They then hang head downwards and moult into a beautiful pale green chrysalis beaded with black and gold. For two weeks the adult butterfly slowly forms inside the chrysalis. A fully fledged butterfly then emerges to fly off, mate and begin the whole cycle again.

Most butterflies live for only a few days or weeks. Many are eaten by birds or other animals. Some, like our native Red Admirals can live for up to six months spending the winter sheltering in places such as under the bark of an old tree. You can tell the ones which have hibernated by their faded or tattered appearance. The Maori called them Kahakura, meaning red garment.

Yellow Admirals, like their red cousins, lay their eggs on stinging nettles which are eaten by their caterpillars. They also bind the nettle leaves together to make protective shelters. Take care if you intend looking for them!

Other common butterflies in New Zealand are the "coppers" or "blues". Both of these families of butterflies have different patterns and shades of colour which vary slightly from region to region. They generally like dry spaces like stony riverbeds or sand-dunes. Their caterpillars munch on *muehlenbeckia* which is also known as pohuehue.

The mountainlands of the South Island are home to two black mountain butterflies and three tussock species which blend in well with their natural surroundings.

In our forest glades, you may spot the rarer beech forest butterfly whose caterpillar feeds on native sedge grasses.

The most well known butterfly is the Small White which was accidentally introduced to New Zealand in the 1930s. Like many other exotic species it has become a pest as its caterpillars destroy valuable crops. You'll probably see it on your cabbages laying eggs which soon develop to large green caterpillars.

If you would like to learn more about butterflies you can send for a giant poster featuring 30 butterflies with notes about them and where they live to Mrs S. Millar, Secretary, N.Z. Entomological Society, 8 Maymorn Road, Te Marua, Upper Hutt, enclosing your return address and a postal note or cheque for \$3.50.

You may also ask your librarian for a loan of the book *New Zealand Butterflies* by Dr George Gibbs which gives a detailed and up-to-date account of the various species known here.

Dr Gibbs supplied the photographs on the next page and he suggested that we should all get to know a lot more about our butterflies particularly since there are not many of them. He also said that we should not clear the shrubs from all the so-called "untidy spaces" around towns — those little gullies and forgotten corners which are regenerating with pohuehue and other natives. These are the favourite haunts of many of our butterflies. 🦋