

“I have often received this species from Samarang, on the northern coast of Java, & China, but this one is from the Coromandel Coast” [India].

“It is located in aforementioned cabinet” [of Mr Raya Breukelerwaerth – apparently a small private collection]



Life history notes on the Lesser Wanderer, *Danaus petilia* (Stoll, 1790) Lepidoptera: Nymphalidae – Wesley Jenkinson



This very common butterfly is known from across most of the Australian mainland including the arid inland areas and western Tasmania (Braby 2000). The adults are known migrants and frequent most habitats from rainforest margins to wide open woodlands and grasslands.

The adults fly within a few meters of the ground but may fly much higher when in search of nectar. They have a rather slow flight, but are capable of fast speeds when disturbed. Flight occurs in both sunny and warm cloudy conditions.

Both sexes are readily attracted to a wide range of small native and exotic flowers and can also be observed imbibing moisture from the ground (mud puddling) during hot weather. Adults are rather fond of imbibing chemicals from damaged Blue Heliotrope (*Heliotropium amplexicaule*) leaves and flowers particularly in freshly mown lawns. The wings are slowly opened and closed while feeding at flowers.

Within Queensland, individual specimens show variation in physical size and slight variation in the size and shape of the white spots on upperside and underside of the wings. To determine the sexes, males have a clearly visible small patch of dull grey scales on the upperside of the hindwing and a corresponding black circle with a white centre on the hindwing underside.



Wingspans for the pictured adult specimens are both 60mm for the male and female.



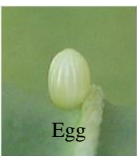
Danaus petilia (Lesser Wanderer) left to right: male, female



Danaus petilia (Lesser Wanderer) left to right: male underside, female underside

Ovipositing females flutter slowly around the host plants and generally settle with wings closed. The eggs are laid singly, chiefly on the underside of fresh or older leaves and flower buds. Females will oviposit within centimetres of ground level if suitable host plants are available.

In January 2007, an egg was collected from near Beaudesert and raised through to an adult on an exotic milkweed, the Balloon Cotton Bush (*Gomphocarpus physocarpus*).



This egg was barrel shaped, approximately 0.9 mm wide x 1.2 mm high, with 21 coarse vertical ribs with very fine horizontal lines, white when laid changing to pale yellow after 2 days.

In captivity the 1st instar larva consumed the eggshell soon after hatching and later fed chewing small patches into the host leaf. As the larva grew, it fed from the edges of the leaves and was observed feeding during daylight hours. It completed five instars and attained a length of 38mm.





1st instar larva



2nd instar larva



3rd instar larva



Above 4th instar larva



Right 5th instar larva



Pre pupa



Pupa



Pupa pre emergence



Green form pupa



Pale caramel form pupa

A pale caramel coloured pupa, measuring 20mm in length, was located below a stem of the host plant. It was attached with silk hanging by the cremaster with the head suspended down. Occasionally the pupae can be a pale caramel colour but are usually green.

Under natural conditions the larvae often leave the host plant and pupate below a nearby grass stem or below a leaf on a nearby shrub and are often heavily

parasitised by Tachinid flies and small wasps.

The total time (during summer) from egg to adult was over 3 weeks, with egg duration 5 days, larval duration 11 days while pupal duration was 8 days.



Within the new boundary of the Scenic Rim Regional Shire south of Brisbane, I have records of adults from all months of the year, being less numerous in the winter months. There are most likely several generations per year in this region.

I would like to thank John Moss for commenting on the manuscript.

References:

Braby, M.F., 2000. *Butterflies of Australia – their identification, biology and distribution*. vol 2. CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne.

Braby, M.F., 2016. *The complete field guide to Butterflies of Australia*. 2nd ed. CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne.

Photos Wesley Jenkinson

ITEMS OF INTEREST

Mistletoe Profile – extract from **The Mistletoes of Sub-tropical Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria** by *John T. Moss and Ross Kendall*

Bronze or Box Mistletoe (*Amyema miquelii*)

Description

The long leaves of this pendulous mistletoe often have a bronze/orange hue especially in strong sunlight. Leaves are up to 25 cm long and 3 cm wide. They are opposite, usually falcate and somewhat resemble those of the host tree.

This mistletoe has umbels of attractive crimson flowers with pink petals and red stamens in multiple triads and occasionally tetrads. The umbel of flowers is usually composed of 3 to 7 rays from each peduncle with all flowers of the triads pedicellated as well as the lateral ones of the tetrads (the central two being sessile). Rarely, the central flower of a triad is sessile, when compared with flowers of *Amyema pendula* where this is always the case.

The fruit (yellowish when ripe) are smooth, barrel shaped and with a rounded bract. They are 10mm long and crowned with a persistent style, compared with *Amyema pendula* where the style is discarded. All fruit are of the same age compared to those of *Amyema pendula* where they are often of different ages.

Habitat and Host Plants

This common and very widespread mistletoe is found on smooth and stringy-barked eucalypts especially Forest Red Gum (*Eucalyptus tereticornis*), Ironbarks (especially *Eucalyptus crebra*), Poplar Box (*Eucalyptus populnea*) and occasionally on acacias, in open forest and woodland.

Butterflies and Moths

- Spotted Jezebel or Wood White (*Delias aganippe*)
- Scarlet or Northern Jezebel (*Delias argenthona*)
- Imperial Jezebel (*Delias harpalyce*)
- Black or Common Jezebel (*Delias nigrina*)
- Trident Pencilled-Blue (*Candalides margarita*)

