



A NATURALIST'S GUIDE TO THE

BUTTERFLIES & MOTHS OF AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

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Monarch Butterfly = *Danaus plexippus* WS 00-100mm

DESCRIPTION One of the most well recognized and studied insects in the world, known equally for its beauty and amazing ecology. Capable of extensive migratory travels, it has made itself famous in Australia New Zealand since first arriving in around 1910. Wings feature easily recognizable black, orange and white patterns, with a wingspan of 89-102mm.

DISTRIBUTION Throughout the North Island and most of the South Island. One for common near human habitations. Sparse in the lower South Island. **HABITS AND HOBBYISTS** Occupies parks and gardens in many areas and winters throughout New Zealand, where

host plants are present, but will flutter into other habitats. Adult butterflies overwinter in sheltered places and sometimes aggregate in sheltered spots in tall trees. Can be seen flying around on sunny, mild winter days. Slow, gliding flight but capable of surprising bursts of power. In New Zealand, most host plants are species of milk plant *Glechomacopus*. In other areas, such as North America, larvae feed on milkweeds *Asclepias*. Eggs laid on undersurface of leaves, larvae mature over about three weeks, developing characteristic black, white and yellow-banded patterns as they mature, then pupate separately in the soil and in a sheltered spot. Adults emerge from its chrysalis after about two weeks of pupation.

REMARKS Eastern North American Monarch populations is extraordinary for its annual southwards low temperature migration from the northern and central United States and southern Canada to Florida and Mexico. During autumn migration, monarchs cross thousands of miles, with a subsequent northward migration from south to spring.



Forest Ringlet = *Chlorinda fabula* WS 05mm 

DESCRIPTION Perhaps the most beautiful endemic butterfly, a special gemstone to behold while sweeping in the bush. Also known as Wilson's Ringlet, it is the only member of the genus *Chlorinda*. Wing upperside reddish brown, but with bill-like brown and yellowish bands running parallel to outer margins, underside banded in silvery white. Series of distinctive orange spots, with four on each forewing and one on each hindwing.

DISTRIBUTION Scattered throughout the North Island and upper South Island in the north

to lower West. Generally rare. **HABITS AND HOBBYISTS** Occupies native forest, especially bush forest. Adults usually found in October-March, but when their flight period is extended to just one or two months, with the months varying with geographical location.

Often flies high off the ground as the forest canopy, so can be very difficult to see or photograph. May descend to feed on flowers or suck on the sap in a forest clearing. Female lay eggs on 'cotton grass' *Cladonia* spp. and more rarely *Chromolaena*. Larvae feed in streams, where (possibly only in northern populations) and spring on the leaves. They have nocturnal or diurnal habits. Adults live for 3-4 weeks and are fast flying. Species is of some conservation concern, as sharp declines have been reported in areas such as the Wairarapa Range west of Auckland. Populations at higher elevations, above 800m, appear to be being harmed more than those at lowland sites. Population on lower by the introduced European 'Wig' *Vaccinium myrsinoides* in a case of decline, in combination with habitat loss.



Larva

Lawyer Pug • *Geometra* WS 24-25mm

DISTRIBUTION One of Australia New Zealand's most beautiful moths. The silken-like *G. glaucata* occurs in a stunning array of colour combinations, often mixing shades of green, grey, white, blue, light yellow, and sometimes orange or purple. Strongly held in hovering with only one leg in use. **DISTRIBUTION** Widespread and common throughout the North and South Islands. Also found on the Chatham Islands and Tokelau/Brewer Island. **HABITS AND HABITATS** Green or pinkish larvae feed on the Bush Louse *Babax caudata*. readily comes to light in houses or sheds/porch. On the wing you stand, but less commonly seen in winter.



Lacebark Looper • *Egyphtea exulans* WS 11-17mm

DISTRIBUTION (Australia). Adult moths can be very variable in the intensity of their colours and markings. Some individuals may have plain yellowish-white with only faint markings, while others bright yellow with strong black. Both grey or purplish and black. **DISTRIBUTION** Widespread on the North and South Islands. **HABITS AND HABITATS** Includes native forest. Larvae feed on native species of Malvaceae including *Milveta* spp. and probably *Pigeaudia* sp. They pupate among dead leaves in a silk cocoon.



Adults feed from flowers and may assist with pollination of *Chrysophyllum* species and *Sida* spp. They have been seen on the wing year round, but are most commonly sighted in November/February. Lacebark Looper can be found in great numbers around forest margins with also of lacebark tree *Hibiscus* spp. Adults nocturnal and attracted to light.

Cabbage Tree Moth • *Egyphtea verticillata* WS 65mm

DISTRIBUTION (Australia exulans) moth with numerous parallel horizontal light brown lines across both forewings and hindwings. **DISTRIBUTION** Widespread on the North and South Islands, and Tokelau/Brewer Island. In the South Island, most common in coastal areas and also in inland regions like Central Otago. **HABITS AND HABITATS** Larvae feed on the cabbage tree *Cordyline australis* and all other native species of *Cordyline*. Wings prominent.

Commonly adults moth against dead cabbage tree leaves, where it often rests. Larvae feed on its wehrhals and native forest. Also found in urban areas, on cabbage trees in urban parks in some gardens and public spaces where people live. Adults seen from spring to late summer (October-May) exulans to light.

