

Note on *Hesperilla chrysotricha plebeia* Waterhouse (Lepidoptera-Hesperiidae)

By

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In this note I record the capture of a butterfly which has remained for more than thirty years the rarest species of its group in Tasmania, no more than four specimens being previously known.

The species was first made known from Tasmania when Waterhouse and Lyell (1914) recorded two males from Bridport. These two specimens were placed under subsp. *cyclospila* Meyrick and Lower, which was originally described from 'Port Lincoln, South Australia: Melbourne, Victoria'.

Hardy (1918) identified a female taken at Latrobe, January 1st, 1915, as *cyclospila* M. and L., but did not describe it.

Waterhouse (1927) when separating the Tasmanian form as a distinct subspecies referred only to the two male specimens from Bridport taken many years before, and made no reference to Hardy's note of the capture of a female specimen.

Referring again to the Tasmanian subspecies, Waterhouse (1932) mentioned four males, from Bridport and Latrobe, but still did not refer to Hardy's female specimen from the latter locality.

Since 1932 this form has not been noted from Tasmania, and the female has remained undescribed throughout the years. As the only records were from Bridport and Latrobe I had considered this species would be confined to the northern coastal areas of Tasmania, but the chance discovery of two empty pupae cases of a form unknown to me on *Gahnia trifida* Lab. at South Arm in January, 1946, led me to suspect that this species might be found in the southern half of the island. A fairly close search on the eastern shores of the Derwent was not however productive of any specimens.

In January, 1947, while collecting on South Bruny, the chance capture of a perfect female specimen within a few yards of the shore line led me to search the extensive swamp area near Lunawanna, with the result that a few females and several males, including a pair taken in cop., were secured. A male specimen emerged at Hobart on January 18th from the only pupa found, although several empty cases were noted in the distinctive twisted shelters which the larvae form from a number of leaves of *Gahnia trifida*.

The description of the female is as follows:

Upperside: forewing brown, basal half covered with short yellowish hairs; cell spot 1.5 mm. square, pale yellow, hyaline; discal spots half this size in areas 3 and 2, a much smaller spot in lower half of area 1a, and a minute dot in upper half of area 1a, pale yellow, hyaline; three subapical spots, white, hyaline; cilia grey brown. Hindwing brown, basal half covered with yellowish hairs, an oblong central patch, and a few scattered scales below the patch, orange; cilia grey brown.

Underside: forewing brown, apex broadly snuff brown, area above cell spot dull yellow; hyaline spots as above; cilia grey brown. Hindwing snuff brown, at dorsum grey brown; a small spot in cell, brown centred silver white; a series of small elongate discal spots from 1a to 6, that in area 6 twice as large as the others, brown; the spots in areas 2, 3, and 6 centred silver white. Cilia grey brown.

Forewing length 17 mm.

Neallotype female labelled 'Lunawanna, Tas. 12-Jan.-47. L. E. Couchman', in the Tasmanian Museum, Hobart, one paratype, 'Lunawanna, Tas. 13-Jan.-47. L. E. Couchman', lodged in the Australian Museum, Sydney, and three paratypes, 'Lunawanna, Tas. 14-Jan.-47. L. E. Couchman' in my own collection.

In the type, and in two of the paratypes, the minute dot in upper half of area 1a of forewing is just discernible on the upperside, in the other two specimens it is only marked on the underside.

Since the male description was based on two specimens from Bridport, and does not in all respects accord with bred and captured males from South Bruny, I note these distinctions. In the Lunawanna males the ground colour above is brown, overlaid on the basal half of the forewing and the hindwing with a dusting of yellowish hairs; the three subapical spots are white, hyaline; the cell and discal spots pale yellow, hyaline, the spot in area 2 half the size of that in area 3; the grey black sex brand is composed of a series of crescents from vein 4 to below vein 1a.

The oblong central patch of the hindwing is orange, and usually there is a scattering of orange scales, divided by vein 4, below the central patch. Beneath, the elongate discal spots of the hindwing vary in size, but that in area 6 is always much larger than the rest, and like the cell spot is always centred silver white.

Forewing length 15 mm.

The rarity of this form would seem to be due to its excessively local character; although the food plant, *Gahnia trifida*, as noted by Rodway, is common in brackish swamps, and as I found, is abundant throughout the swamps of South Bruny, the butterfly was confined to an area of less than two acres, and no specimen was noted outside this one restricted locality.

It seems quite possible however, that this species may be found in other coastal localities, particularly on the northern and eastern coasts of Tasmania, but perhaps as restricted in area as on South Bruny.

REFERENCES

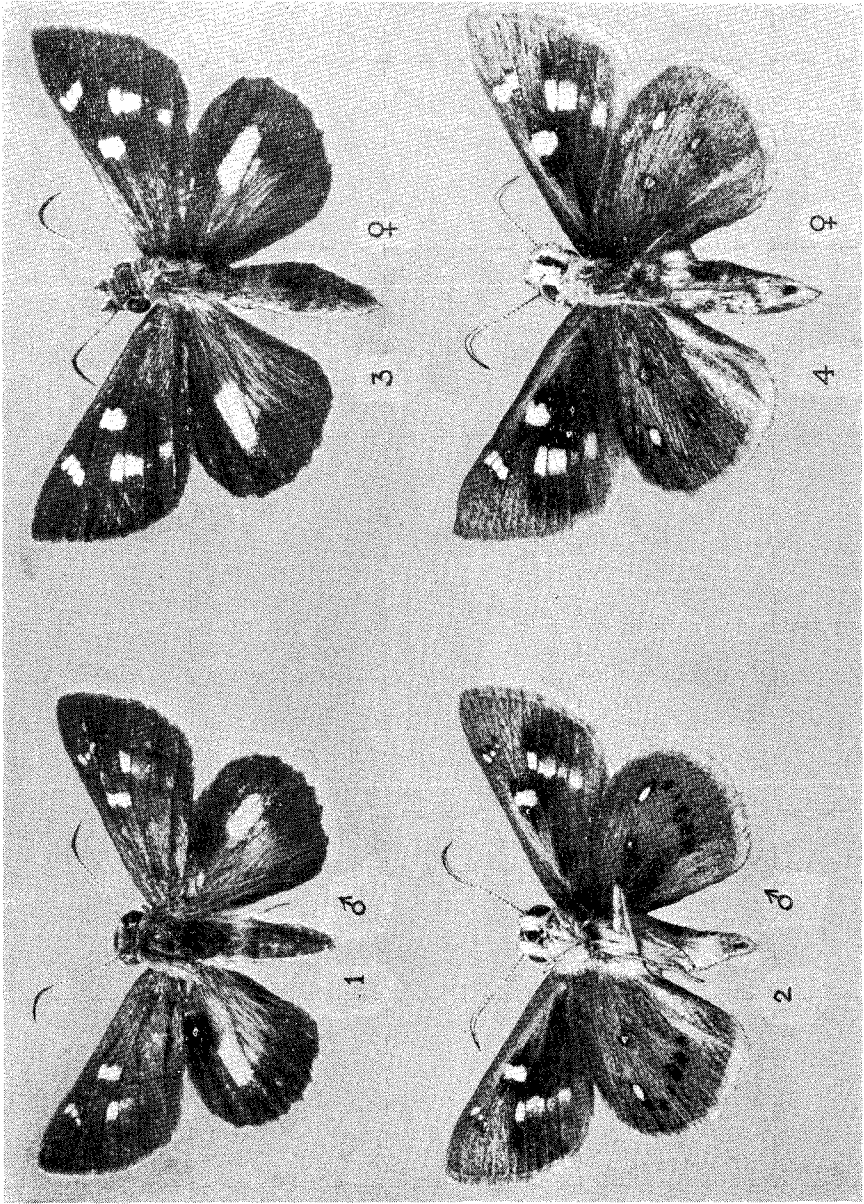
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PLATE I

Hesperilla chrysotricha plebeia Waterhouse.

- FIG. 1.—Male, upperside. Lunawanna, Tas. 14-Jan.-1947.
 FIG. 2.—Male, underside of same specimen.
 FIG. 3.—Neallotype female, upperside. Lunawanna, Tas. 12-Jan.-1947.
 FIG. 4.—Neallotype female, underside of same specimen.

All figures $\times 2$.



(Photo., Tas. Govt. Photo. Lab.)