

Scientific Note: new records of *Marpesia chiron* (Lepidoptera: Nymphalidae) from Jamaica

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Marpesia chiron F. has a wide distribution stretching from southern Texas to Brazil and Argentina, Cuba and the Isle of Pines, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico and Jamaica (Smith *et al.*, 1994). The species is common on the Central American mainland and is sometimes referred to as the Common Dagger-tail (Riley, 1975). Breeding populations have been recorded on three of the islands of the Greater Antilles, Cuba and the Isle of Pines, where it is fairly common, on Hispaniola where populations are localized, and on Puerto Rico where sightings are rare and breeding populations, if they exist, are highly localized (Smith *et al.*, 1994). However, no breeding population has been reported from Jamaica. Records from Jamaica are rare and include sightings/collections in 1929, 1931 and 1951 (Brown & Heineman, 1972); all except one record are from the north-central region of the island; the other is from the southeast (Fig. 1). It is generally believed that species might be a migrant to the island (Brown & Heineman, 1972; Smith *et al.*, 1994). *Marpesia*

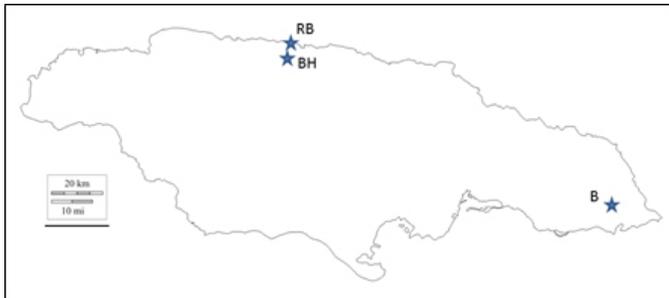


Fig. 1. Locations from which *M. chiron* has been recorded on Jamaica: Rio Bueno (RB); Baron Hill (BH); and Bath (B).

chiron is one of the two *Marpesia* species on Jamaica, the other being *M. eleucea pellenis* (Godart). *Marpesia eleucea* is widespread across Jamaica but is generally uncommon (Brown & Heineman, 1972; Smith *et al.*, 1994).

On January 31, 2016, a single specimen of *M. chiron* was observed at Rio Bueno, north-central Jamaica. This specimen was in excellent condition, and appeared to be fresh (Fig. 2). One week later, February 7, the species was again observed. As many as three individuals were observed at any one time, but the number was clearly greater than this as several individuals seen flying alone could be distinguished by distinct wing marks. No fresh specimens were observed on this second visit, instead, all had significant wing wear – a varying number of wing chips, loss of tails, and even significant loss of the hind wing.

Interestingly, Rio Bueno was the site of the 1951 record. The repeated records from Rio Bueno, and the fresh specimen on January 31, suggests the possibility of a breeding population. The suggestion by Brown & Heineman (1972) that “a breeding colony should be sought by resident collectors” seems even more applicable at this time to this location. A rapid survey of the area revealed the presence of species of *Ficus* (potential hosts plants, Srygley *et al.*, 2014), but no larvae were found.

The occurrence of potential host plants makes the establishment of breeding populations highly plausible. Srygley *et al.* (2014) noted that this species feeds on several members of the family Moraceae, including some species non-native to the Neotropics. Adams (1970) recorded 17 species in 9 genera in that family of plants occurring on Jamaica, including some species of known host plants of *M. chiron*, such as *Artocarpus het-*



Fig. 2. *Marpesia chiron* from Rio Bueno, Jamaica.

erophyllus Lam. and *Brosimum alicastrum* Sw. Srygley *et al.* (2014) indicated that there is evidence of specialization on food plants by different populations; this specialization might reduce the chances of a migrating population becoming established on Jamaica.

Marpesia chiron is well known for its migration and it has been known to travel hundreds of kilometres over water (Dudley & Srygley, 2008). Jamaica is only 140 km from Cuba, hence the island is within the dispersive range of *M. chiron*, especially in the presence of northeast trade winds. The re-occurrence of records suggest a regular migration pathway, assuming no breeding population is present.

The butterflies were observed in a clearing at the edge of a dry limestone forest. Shortly after sunrise they basked in the sun but later spent most of their time sitting head down and aggressively patrolling. The presence of other members of the species initiated intense responses, and individuals repeatedly exchanged what appeared to be the prime perching sites. Other butterfly species were also attacked. Nectaring was not observed.

There is clearly a need for careful study of the Rio Bueno site in an attempt to establish if a breeding population exists. The search should be extended beyond Rio Bueno given that two of the previous sightings (1929 and 1931) were from Baron Hill (Brown & Heineman, 1972), approximately 4.5 km to the south of this site.

LITERATURE CITED

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