

# *HEMIARGUS AMMON* (LUCAS), A NEW BUTTERFLY FOR JAMAICA (LEPIDOPTERA: LYCAENIDAE)

DAVID C. IFTNER<sup>1</sup> JOHN A. SHUEY<sup>2</sup> AND JOHN V. CALHOUN<sup>3</sup>

8 Alpine Trail, Sparta, New Jersey 07871, USA<sup>1</sup>

Battelle - Great Lakes Environmental Center, 739 Hastings, Traverse City, Michigan 49684, USA<sup>2</sup>

1731 San Mateo Drive, Dunedin, Florida 34698, USA<sup>3</sup>

Few Caribbean Islands have had their butterfly fauna as well studied as Jamaica. Over the years a number of papers have been published that document and/or list the species that occur here, with the most recent and most complete treatment, *Jamaica and its Butterflies* (Brown and Heineman, 1972), listing 120 species. Since then, only three species, *Tmolus azia* (Hewitson) (Vyhmeister, 1980), *Junonia genoveva* (Cramer) (Turner and Parnell, 1985), and *Cyanophrys hartii* T. W. Turner and J. Y. Miller (Turner and Miller, 1992) have been officially added. We hereby add yet another, *Hemiargus ammon* (Lucas), bringing the total number of butterflies known for Jamaica to 124 species.

On 22 October 1985 while collecting in an open, scrubby field approximately 8 kilometers west of Ocho Rios, St. Ann Parish, Jamaica, one male and two females of *H. ammon* (Lucas) (Fig. 1-2), were collected by D. C. Iftner and J. A. Shuey. This butterfly is generally distributed throughout the Caribbean region, and is found on Cuba, the Isle of Pines (Alayo and Hernandez, 1987), the Bahamas, and the Cayman Islands (Riley, 1975).

This butterfly is undoubtedly an established breeding resident because it was collected again at the above locality by D. C. Iftner on 29 November 1987 and 1 December 1987, as well as at a second locality 0.7km west of the first locality on 12 November 1990. Thomas W. Turner (pers. comm., 1992) also found *H. ammon* at the original locality in December 1991. Both habitats from which this species has been collected are near sea level and close to the coast, and can best be described as open, degraded fields containing low grasses and shrub. Each field is bordered by disturbed regrowing forest scrubs. Both fields and the surrounding woodland are heavily grazed by goats.

Because of the frequency in which this species has been encountered over the past few years, we feel that *H. ammon* is a recent arrival to Jamaica. Historically, Jamaica has been well collected and documented. Brown and Heineman (1972) reviewed all of the records known to them without finding *H. ammon*, although they considered it curious that it did not occur on Jamaica. In addition, Thomas W. Turner collected butterflies throughout Jamaica in the many years that he lived there without

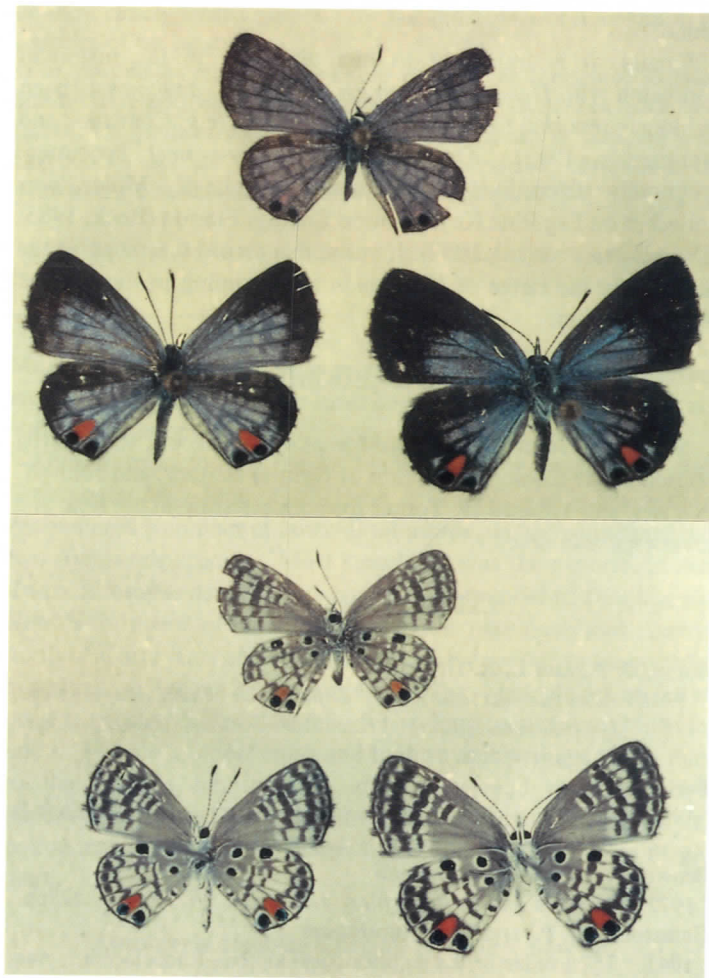


Fig. 1-2. First male (upper specimen) and females (lower specimens) of *H. ammon* to be collected on Jamaica: 1. Dorsal view (upper group); 2. Ventral view (lower group).

detecting this species. Our experience with *H. ammon* indicates that while it is local in nature, it is common enough that it should have been found prior to our discovery. In addition, no subspecific differentiation has taken place between Jamaica and Cuba. Our specimens agree closely with *H. a. ammon* from Cuba but

2. Research Associate, Carnegie Museum of Natural History, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15213, USA

3. Research Associate, Florida State Collection of Arthropods, DPI, FDACS, Gainesville, Florida 32614, USA.

not with *H. ammon* (representing an undescribed subspecies) from the Bahamas. While this evidence is indirect, it does argue that this butterfly is probably not an original component of Jamaica's highly endemic fauna. It also suggests that *H. ammon* may have colonized Jamaica from Cuba in recent times.

Conversely, it is possible that this butterfly has always been a part of Jamaica's fauna but just simply overlooked. The small size of this species, the local nature of its colonies, its occurrence with two very similar and much more common species of blues (*Leptotes cassius theonus* [Lucas] and *Hemiargus ceraunus ceraunus* [Fabricius]), and the tendency of many collectors to neglect the blues in their fieldwork could all account for why this butterfly has not been found until now. Whatever the scenario, this small butterfly has the potential of being quite common in the proper habitat, and will undoubtedly be found in other localities on Jamaica. Individuals hoping to find *H. ammon* on Jamaica should sample larger numbers of blues, particularly in habitats similar to the locations in which the first two populations were found.

Finally, it is important to note that due to the historical confusion with *Hemiargus thomasi* Clench, *H. ammon* has been dubiously reported from Florida several times (e.g. Comstock and Huntington, 1943). On 5 April 1984, one fresh specimen, tentatively determined as *H. ammon* by L. D. Miller, was collected on Big Pine Key, Monroe County, Florida (Beck, 1985; T. Kral, pers. comm., 1992). If valid, this record may support the notion that the range of *H. ammon* is expanding in the Greater Antilles region.

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