

Butterflies to enjoy before winter

BY LINDA KAPPEN

Blue Copper

The Blue Copper (*Lycaena heteronea*) is of the butterfly family Lycaenidae. Its habitat is open mountain meadows to higher elevation ridges and slopes. Blue Coppers can be seen flying as early as May through September with July usually the peak of their flight. In our local Siskiyou I have observed them through late September.

The Blue Copper butterfly is one of the larger lycaenids with the male having a bright blue color on open wing. The wings have a thin black border fringed with white edges and veins outlined in black. This arrangement makes for a simply beautiful butterfly indeed. Males will flitter about patrolling for females while visiting flowers and mud.

On open wing, the female Blue Copper shows a soft dark tan color with black spots and a very white-fringed border. Both males and females will rest with wings open revealing their beauty.

The host plants for this butterfly are different species of *Eriogonum*, commonly named buckwheats. Females have been observed ovipositing (laying) eggs on the flowers of the host plants rather than on the stalks or leaves. Eggs will diapause over the winter, producing one generation.

In their mid to high-mountain habitats, Blue Coppers like to nectar on their larval host plants and other plants such as asters, yarrow, rabbit brush, fiddle-necks or milkweeds.

I will still be looking for this species in early fall when on outings, hoping to see their beauty one more time before winter. The fun part is they can be seen almost anywhere in our Siskiyou mountains.

Milbert's Tortoiseshell

Milbert's Tortoiseshell (*Nymphalis milberti*) is of the butterfly family Nymphalidae. With its flame-colored bands, deep mahogany middle and bright blue crescents on the edges, this butterfly is unique in color and stunning beauty. With these markings, it is also known as the Fire-rim Tortoiseshell, although in southern Oregon I have heard it referred to only as Milbert's Tortoiseshell. You will find it throughout the Pacific Northwest.

This butterfly hibernates through winter in tree holes, hollow logs, under bark and in barns and other outbuildings. Like the Mourning Cloak, some individuals can live up to 10 or 11 months and can be seen flying almost any day of the year during warm spells.

The host plant is stinging nettles where eggs are laid in large clusters under leaves. Up to 900 eggs have been recorded in clusters. These butterflies can have up to two broods.

In spring, Milbert's Tortoiseshells can be seen on wing at lower elevations of the Applegate Valley, then at high mountain elevations in summer where they live nectaring on coyote mint, asters, dogbane and others. Then, as fall approaches, they descend to lower elevations to hibernate



Blue Copper male on lupine

during the coldest winter months.

Seeing a Milbert's Tortoiseshell as it sits on the ground with open wings is almost like discovering your favorite semiprecious stone. (On closed wing it resembles bark.) Most likely, you will do a double take, then watch it for as long as you can if you are lucky enough to find one willing to sit around. Late last summer I was able to sit on a rock in the middle of a patch of dogbane while some butterflies and Milberts nectared, carefully capturing as many photos as I could of this rare occasion. I will be sure to return soon to capture even better photos.

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Ed. Note: The author earned a naturalist certification from Siskiyou Field Institute and hosts two-day butterfly courses there.



Blue Copper female on host plant eriogonum



Milbert's Tortoiseshell on dogbane flowers

All butterfly photos by Linda Kappen.

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