

Not too late to see Melissa Blue butterfly and Ornate Tiger Moth

BY LINDA KAPPEN

Melissa Blue butterfly

The Melissa Blue (*Plebejus Melissa*) is a butterfly of the Lycaenidae family. Its wingspan is up to one and three-eighths inches. The upper side or dorsal view of the male is blue with a thin black line around the border. The female dorsal view is brown tinged with blue and a border of orange on forewings and hindwings.

The male Melissa Blue will patrol larval host plants waiting for females. The female will lay eggs on host plants or other plant stems or twigs nearby, and their eggs will overwinter. Ants tend to the larvae as they grow, keeping them safe from predators and stroking the caterpillars until they secrete a sweet sticky treat for the ants. (See the spring 2014 *Applegater* for a story about Silvery Blues butterflies and their symbiotic relationship with ants.)

The Melissa Blue can be seen in flight from late April to late September in southern Oregon. They like to nectar on many flowers, including their host plants, which are a variety of legumes such as lotuses, lupines, and vetches.



Their habitats are open fields, prairies, and disturbed areas.

The Melissa Blue is quite common, and its range is throughout the west from Canada to Baja California. The photo of the Melissa Blue on this page was taken on a 30-acre reserve owned by Southern Oregon Land Conservancy along Williams Creek in Williams, Oregon, in May 2015. This male Melissa was friendly to the camera as I followed it from plant to plant on an open rocky beach next to the creek.

Note: The Karner Blue butterfly found in the eastern US is a subspecies of the Melissa Blue butterfly. The Karner

Blue is imperiled due to its rarity and other factors that make it vulnerable to extinction throughout its range. This species, described by famous novelist and lepidopterist Vladimir Nabokov in the 1940s, was classified endangered in 1992. In May 2000, the Karner Blue was listed as locally extinct in Canada. Conservation efforts have been underway in the eastern US for a number of years.

Ornate Tiger Moth

The Ornate Tiger Moth (*Grammia Ornata*) is of the moth family Erebididae. When wings are open, the moth can be about one and a quarter to one and a half inches wide. The forewings have a netted pattern with yellow and black. The hind wings are yellow to orange with black spots, the black mostly fusing together on the wing margins (or edges).

The adult male is nocturnal and will come to light. The female is heavily bodied with a large abdomen and can be

found in the daylight sitting or slowly fluttering about on the ground. The adults can be seen in late spring to early summer.

The larvae of the Ornate Tiger Moth are generalist feeders and will feed on foliage of many herbaceous plants in the spring. The moth's habitat is moist to open forest, grasslands, and high mountain meadows west of the Cascades. The range of this species occurs west of the Rocky Mountains in the Pacific Northwest.

It is documented that this species in the Pacific Northwest is larger in Oregon than in other Pacific Northwest states. The Ornate Tiger Moth in the photo was found in the Klamath-Siskiyou in California just over the border from Oregon. Being so close, it really was large. I found this particular moth in April 2016 near the Klamath River on a road running along a creek. The area had many herbaceous plants. The moth was sitting on the ground with closed wing and looked very fresh. It was indeed heavily bodied, able only to flutter its wings and fly a few inches. I was able to gently open the wings for a fuller view and positive identification.

It was a good find and one of the highlights of a fine spring day observing butterflies and moths.

Linda Kappen

humbukkapps@hotmail.com

Linda earned a naturalist certification from Siskiyou Field Institute and hosts two-day butterfly courses there.

Photo left: Melissa Blue butterfly found along Williams Creek. Photo below: Ornate Tiger Moth found near the Klamath River. Photos: Linda Kappen.



Cantrall Buckley Park butterfly project: Bringing back the monarch

BY JANIS MOHR-TIPTON

Many locals who lived in the Applegate Valley in the 1970s tell us that monarch butterflies were around every year from May into fall and that lots of caterpillars and fluttering adults were seen around Ruch School and the valley. Now, 40 years later, we see very few. What happened?

Several years ago, Tom Landis, a forester with US Forest Service (USFS) who retired after 30 years as a nursery specialist, moved to the Rogue Valley. He saw very few monarchs and thought that they were not very common. After researching, he learned that the western monarch populations had crashed, so he used his nursery training to propagate the food they needed to see if they would return. In spring 2014, he planted a patch of milkweed for the caterpillars—milkweed is their only food source—to test his “if you plant it, they will come” theory. The project worked. The butterflies came to the milkweed patch the first year and laid their eggs. The resulting caterpillars began feasting on the milkweed and made their chrysalises. Monarchs emerged to fly in our skies again. (See article in *Medford Mail Tribune*, September 22, 2014.)

Now, many individuals and groups of people are helping to restore lost habitat and creating way (feeding) stations with native milkweed and nectar plants throughout the migratory path of the western monarch.

Research has shown that monarchs have the genetic coding to come to our area to find their

food. Milkweed has been considered a noxious weed and is often sprayed or mowed. If we want monarchs back, we have to let our wild patches of milkweed grow and also provide more native plantings. Monarch eggs are laid on the underside of the leaves of the milkweed; the caterpillar attaches its chrysalis to the milkweeds, too.

At Cantrall Buckley Park, a project is in the planning stage to create a monarch way station in the park that will help support habitat and be an educational tool to encourage others to join in the effort to restore habitat throughout the Applegate Valley. This project is a joint effort of USFS, Applegate Valley Garden Club, Applegate Elementary School students, and Linda Kappen of Southern Oregon Monarch Advocates (SOMA).

The migration of the monarch is amazing, and the part we play in habitat restoration is important for their survival. Monarchs, which are really a tropical butterfly, have several generations of egg-to-adult life cycles of six to ten weeks each in order to be able to migrate from the edge of Canada to southern California. A typical life cycle of an egg is three to four days, a larvae/caterpillar's is two to four weeks, a chrysalis's is two to four weeks, and an adult butterfly's life-span is from two to four weeks.

Monarch breeding activity in Southern Oregon is from May into late fall, when the butterflies migrate to warmer locations. Monarchs are in our area for the longest period of time. Also,



Over two years ago, owners of a property behind Ruch School saw milkweed growing in a pasture that had been kept mowed and decided to let it grow.

Last summer they had lots of caterpillars and adults in the native milkweed. Monarch photo: Erin Galbraith. Caterpillar photo: Jamie Lusch, Mail Tribune.

the fourth generation born in southern Oregon is called the “Super Generation” because its life cycle is the longest at seven to nine months. Then they fly from our region to southern California for overwintering in a warmer climate, and in the spring they lay their eggs to start the migration cycle north again.

Timing is important, so this fall—with the park setting as protection for the monarch and with milkweed in the ground, pollinator plants in place, and a “puddling” area for moisture and minerals—visit the park and see a monarch way station in action.

Janis Mohr-Tipton

541-846-7501

Applegate Valley Garden Club
janismohrtipton48@frontier.com

For more information

- Ecoregional Planting Guides—www.pollinator.org/guides.htm
- Facebook: Milkweeds for Monarch Waystations and Monarch Butterflies in the Pacific Northwest
- Local native milkweed plants: Applegate School Milkweed Gardens—Linda Kappen at 541-846-6280
- Local native milkweed and nectar plants: Forest Farm—541-846-7269, www.forestfarm.com; Goodwin Creek Nursery—541-846-7357, www.goodwincreekgardens.com; Shooting Star Nursery—541-840-6453, www.roguevallynursery.com.
- Local native milkweed seed and plants: Klamath-Siskiyou Seeds—www.klamathsiskiyouseeds.com
- Southern Oregon Monarch Advocates—<http://somonarchs.org>

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