

THRICE IN A BLUE MOON – A BRIEF DIVERSION INTO ENTOMOLOGY

Nick Miller
(ncmiller@orcon.net.nz)

In late February 1968, recently emerged from school, I was travelling with my parents around the East Coast of the North Island, on SH 35 between Rotorua and Gisborne. My father, an ENT specialist, was testing childrens' hearing at the various rural schools along that route. We stopped at Waikawa Bay, about 10 km east of Te Kaha, for a cup of tea. While my parents busied themselves with the Thermos, I climbed a boundary fence into the grassland just over the road from the seashore, to explore up the little stream that flows there.

A large, dark and handsome butterfly, slightly larger than the familiar Monarch, and which was flying swiftly but erratically across the grass, caught my attention. I followed it, fascinated, for some distance before it vanished into some manuka scrub. When we returned to Auckland, I consulted A.W.B. Powell's classic 'Native Animals of New Zealand' (1947) – an updated version of this work is still in print today. It appeared that the butterfly was a Blue Moon (*Hypolimnas bolina nerina*), a visitor to the West Coast of both islands when it is blown across the Tasman during westerly storms, and Powell describes it as a 'vagrant' and 'a great rarity in New Zealand'. It is not recorded as breeding in New Zealand.

Fast-forwarding to May 2014, Elizabeth and I were staying at Tim Senior's bach (familiar to many RotBotSoc members), located only about 3 km east of Waikawa Bay. On a sunny morning, I was down exploring the rocks near the main fishing spot and I saw a Blue Moon resting on a sun-warmed rock face, and on nearby hebes. Here is a photograph of it (*next page*). Being fast and alert, they are difficult to capture in a decent photo, and you have to take your chance when it occurs. A second one then joined this specimen, before they both flew away. Several minutes later I saw one of them flying across the clearing that surrounds the bach. This seems quite late in the season to see these butterflies

Then on to 2015, same location, when in February I saw yet another Blue Moon, again on the sun-warmed rocks close to the fishing spot. It flew away and I didn't see it again. According to the website NZ Butterfly info (<http://nzbutterfly.info/>), concerning the Blue Moon, “in years when sizable numbers come to New Zealand, then they are more likely to be seen east of the North Island ranges. Their food plants are found in New Zealand, so this species could breed in here. But it has never being recorded breeding in the wild as yet though.” (<http://nzbutterfly.info/migrant/blue-moon/index.htm>)



A Blue Moon butterfly (*Hypolimnas bolina nerina*) on a hebe at Tokatea, Eastern Bay of Plenty.
Photo, N.C. Miller, May 2014

I can't help but wonder whether the specimens I saw out east may be breeding there – they are a long way from the more usual distribution area, although they have occasionally been recorded that far east.

The caterpillars have been recorded as commonly feeding on Lesser Joyweed (*Alternanthera denticulata*)- **Amaranthaceae**; Paddy's Lucerne (*Sida* spp.)- **Malvaceae** ; Pigweed (*Portulaca* spp.) – **Portulacaceae** and *Synedrella* - **Asteraceae**. They have also been recorded on *Asystasia scandens* - **Acanthaceae**, *Pseuderanthemum variabile* -

Acanthaceae and *Ruellia* - **Acanthaceae**. A number of these plants, or others in their genus, occur in NZ. It would be interesting to determine whether any of these plants are found in the Eastern Bay of Plenty, which has a particularly mild climate, and supports a wide range of exotic plants.

The author would be happy to hear of other encounters with Blue Moon butterflies in the Bay of Plenty – where and when, and if possible, the plant species on which they were seen.

TRIP PROGRAMME 2016

****Please note:** We would like intending participants to give the leader a call during the week before the trip. This will give the leader an idea of the party, and enable them to give you any last minute information. If the leader is not available contact Paul Cashmore 07 349-7432 (wk), or 027 650 7264.

The meeting place for all trips, unless otherwise stated, is the carpark between the Convention Centre and the Police Station, Fenton Street, Rotorua (hereinafter called "the Rotorua carpark"). We will carpool with a donation for petrol expenses for cars/boats to drivers please.

Reminder to trip leaders

Please remember to collect the first aid kit and PLB (Personal Locator Beacon) from John Hobbs or supply your own. You are also responsible for delegating the writing up of the trip report or writing it yourself and getting it to the editor within 4 weeks of the trip. A very brief report is much better than no report! If you have email send the report to: ncmiller@orcon.net.nz (Note: IBM compatible Word 2010 preferred).

Saturday 20 February – Whakamarama wetlands, Kaimai Mamaku Forest Park
(combined with Waikato Botanical Society)

Leader : Kerry Jones. 07 855 9700 / 027 747 0733 / km8j1s@gmail.com

Host : Anne Mackersey.

Meet : Whakamarama Hall at 9:30 am (Opposite the school).

Grade: Medium

To get to the Whakamarama Hall head north from Tauranga on SH 2, go through Te Puna and then over the Te Puna Stream Bridge. After the bridge turn left on to Barrett Road, then left on to Old State Highway and then right on to Whakamarama Road. The Whakamarama Hall is about 4.5 km up Whakamarama Road (opposite the school).