Small White

Pieris rapae

Description

Suspected that it first arrived in New Zealand in the summer of 1929-30, it was first recorded in Napier in March 1930. The Small White quickly spread all over New Zealand by the autumn or 1936. However there seems to be 'jumps' in its dispersal over those few years, for example the first specimen in the South Island was in the port town of Timaru, not in the Marlborough region as one would expect by natural dispersion. So the logical conclusion is that some specimens where transported around the country along with our shared food of the cabbage family. This is the way it is suspected that the White Butterfly made it to New Zealand (just like North America in the years before & Australia in the years after). However, no one is sure whether the New Zealand stock came from Hawaii, North America, Europe, Asia or a combination. But most likely it travelled as a pupa in diapause as this would give it the best chance of surviving in a cold store. It is recorded as having up to 5 generations a year in the north & 2 generations in the south, but I think that is more like 6 in the north & 3 in the south. The White Butterfly is considered a pest, so several parasites (Ichneumon's, the wasps Pteromalus *Puparum* & *Apanteles glomeratus*) have being released to control it, but they are also effecting other species, especially the Red & Yellow Admirals. It has characteristics not seen in other New Zealand Butterflies, firstly the aforementioned diapause, a seasonal difference in size & less black marking on the spring generation. The Maori name is translated from the English name.

Ovum

Creamy colour when laid & deepening to yellow before hatching. It is tall in shape with approximately 12 ridges. Laid singularly on foodplant, usually on the underside of a leaf. It takes from 6-10 days to hatch on average, but will quicker in hotter conditions or slower in cooler conditions. The shell is eaten by the newly hatched larva for its first meal.

Larvae

Velvety green with light stripe along back. It has being known to be dormant over winter. The larva will generally stay on the same leaf as the egg was oviposited until the 3rd instar when it will move towards the centre of the plant, where it remains until pupation. The larvae live about 23-25 days, with about 4 days between each instar apart from the 5th instar which lasts about 8 days. Grows up to 34mm when fully grown.

Pupa

Green to yellow-brown. Attached by cremaster & girdle on foodplant leaves or nearby structures. The autumn generation will go into diapause for 3 to 5 months.

Imago

The spring generation has a 38-43mm wingspan & the summer generations have a 48-50mm wingspan. It's flight is swift & jerky, but will fly on overcast days, even in drizzle when most other butterflies call it a day. It seldom settles in one spot for long, before flying on. On a sunny day the females will alternate between feeding & ovipositing. Both genders have a black wingtip. The male has one spot on its forewing & the female has two. Other differences are that underside of hind wing is a paler yellow on the male & the male has androconial scales which are almost invisible as they are white too.

Male

© 2011 Robert Arter-Williamson

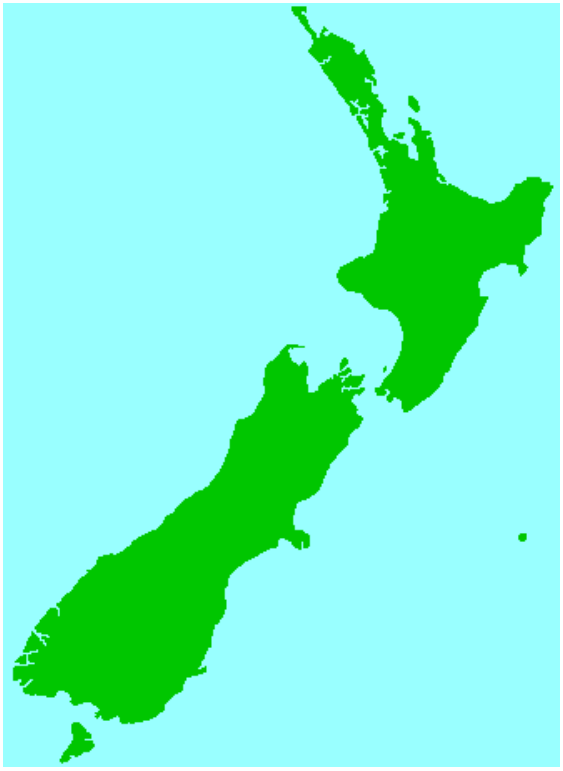
Female

Habitat
Everywhere, especially Gardens & market gardens where it's a major pest. Breeds only at lower altitudes.

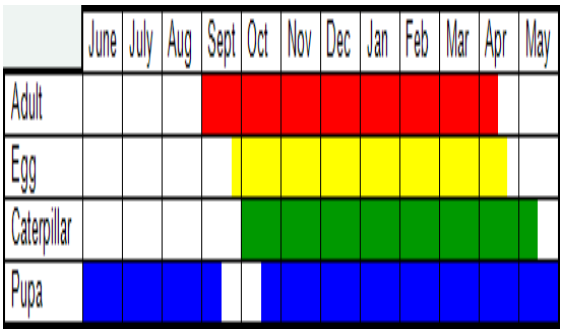
Food Plants
Cabbage, Broccoli, Cauliflower, Swedes, Turnips & Nasturtiums to name a few common foodplants, in fact, it will feed on pretty much any Cruciferous plant which contains Mustard oil.

Status
Extensive Found Nationwide, including the Chatham & sub-Antarctic Islands.

Distribution



Phenology



Copyright
All content belongs to Robert Arter-Williamson and www.nzbutterfly.info.

Factsheet Design lay out by Stuart Desjardins.

© 2011 Robert Arter-Williamson