

A BUTTERFLY MIGRATION IN KENYA, MAY 1987

by
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During a business visit to Nyeri in central Kenya on the 25th and 26th of May 1987 I witnessed a mixed butterfly migration of moderate proportion. They were flying through the town towards the SSW, almost at right angles to a mild wind from the west. By far the main component of the migration was *Catopsilia florella* FABRICIUS, with yellow females predominating. Both sexes of this species were present in approximately equal numbers.

Official duties made any careful investigation of the migration impossible. However, it was clearly noticeable and continued for at least two full days in the same direction and with equal density, stopping when dense cloud shut off the sun. I was able to make one fifteen minute count over a fifty metre front on Nyeri golf course:

<i>Papilio demodocus</i> ESPER	3
<i>Anaphaeis creona</i> CRAMER	3
<i>Catopsilia florella</i> FABRICIUS	42
<i>Junonia hierta</i> CRAMER	6
indet	2
Total	56

These species were seen in numbers also throughout the two days; the only other possible migrant was *Tirumala petiverana* of which I saw too few to be quite sure.

The width of the migration was at least two kilometres, but probably more. Using the figures of 50 specimens per 50 metres per 15 minutes over two days with five hours of activity and estimate of 80.000 individuals is arrived at. There may have been many more.

The behaviour of the migrants was the usual one as described earlier from Benin in Atalanta (LARSEN, 1978). In many respects the migration was similar to an earlier Kenyan record from December 1984 (LARSEN, 1985), but very different from the large migration in December 1975 consisting wholly of *Anaphaeis aurota* F. (LARSEN, 1977).

The migration in question took place during the so-called long rains, which were delayed and weak according to the Nyeri District Commissioner. The December migrations were during the short rains. It would probably be worthwhile analysing African butterfly migration records in relation to the local rainy seasons. The massive migrations in South India are clearly related to the advance and retreat of

the SW monsoon (unpublished).

References

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