

The presence of *Araschnia levana* (LINNAEUS, 1758) in Italy

(Lepidoptera, Nymphalidae)

by

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Introduction

The authors have recently captured both generations of *Araschnia levana* L. in Friuli around Udine, thus confirming the existence of this species in Italian territory. The precise indication of the locality has been omitted in order to avoid overcollection of this local population. The presence of this very rare Italian species (discovered in 1986) has not been reported by the authors up until now, due to insufficient captures. They were waiting for further proof in order to confirm that the presence of the species was not incidental. After extensive research, it would seem that the species is not present in many habitats, even if similar areas are present nearby. As the species is potentially expanding, more field studies will be necessary to confirm the colonization of more zones.

Ecology

The habitat of the species is formed by undergrowth where the foodplant *Urtica dioica* is in abundance. The dominant mixed wood ("illyric" oriental fagus climax) is composed by *Picea*, *Abies* and *Fagus*; in the glades *Rubus*, *Helianthemum*, *Angelica*, etc. grow. The adults of *A. levana* L. normally rest on leaves of *Rubus* and Umbellifera, feeding on blooms of both plants. The males, being far more active than the females, flutter their wings and fight for the possession of favourable observation points. The females, being less active, were mainly found to be resting, or searching for suitable plants for laying the eggs.

Phenology

Usually first generation (f. *levana*) is on the wing from the end of April to June, depending on the season. The summer generation (f. *prorsa*) emerges in July–August. Both generations were always at low density. Up until now a partial third generation has not been observed, even if it is occasionally present in some European populations (CARNIER, 1995).

Distribution

Araschnia levana is present in Europe from Spain, France, Switzerland, Germany, Holland, Sweden, Austria to the Balkans, and recently reported for North-eastern Greece (KOUTROUBAS, 1991 and pers. obs.); it is probably extinct in Great Britain (KUDRNA, 1986). The species was recorded for Northern Italy (Piemont, Lombardia, Alto Adige) at the end of the 19th century (VERITY, 1950), but not recently reported from these regions, and considered as extinct. In the general collection of Museo di Storia Naturale (Verona) some specimens, collected not later than 1902 in Verona Province by Mr. DAL NERO, are present. More recently, a single record is reported by STORACE (1956) from Great San Bernardo and by HOLZAPFEL (1986) from Monte Baldo, being both signalations without precise indications. HARTIG reported few captures from Val di Iures, Alto Adige (1968), in the same biotops some specimens

have been captured in the first years of '50 (unpubl. records, BERETTA pers. comm.). Recently, both LEIGHEB and NARDELLI and SALA tried to reintroduce the species (the former in Novara prov., the latter in Trento prov.) to suitable habitats, but both experiments failed completely. Due to the natural tendency of some oriental species, like *Leptidea morsei* and *Hemaris croatica* (GIOVANOLI, pers. comm.), to spread to the west during last years, reaching Italian territory, it seems that the recently discovered colony of *A. levana* L. has its origins from the Slovenian populations, the species being there well distributed.

Riassunto

Con il presente lavoro gli autori segnalano la presenza, ormai consolidata, di una popolazione di *Araschnia levana* in Friuli. Si tratta della prima conferma certa dell'appartenenza di questa specie alla fauna italiana, dopo le ultime catture accertate in provincia di Verona, avvenute nei primi anni di questo secolo, e le segnalazioni generiche di STORACE (1956) ed HOLZAPFEL (1986). La popolazione friulana, ben stabilizzata, ha colonizzato alcuni biotopi ristretti in provincia di Udine. Vengono fornite inoltre alcune notizie sulla etologia e fenologia della specie. A cause dell'estrema localizzazione e bassa densità della colonia, non si forniscono volutamente ulteriori indicazioni sulla esatta località di osservazione, quale misura di salvaguardia della specie.

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