Nota lepid. 2 (4) : 137–138; 31. V. 1980 ISSN 0342–7536

The foodplant of Erebia aethiopella (Hoffmannsegg 1806). (Satyridae)

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Apparently the foodplant of *Erebia aethiopella* (Hoffmannsegg) has remained unrecorded up to now. In his monograph Warren (1936) makes no mention o fit, and Higgins and Riley (1976 : 180) specifically state "larval food plants not known".

In 1974 I undertook a small collecting-trip to the Alpes Maritimes with the specific aim of collecting *Erebia aethiopella mediterranea* Warren 1933 in the area. At the end of July I searched around Terme di Valdieri, even up to the Col di Valasco (ca. 2200 m), where Enrico Gallo had previously taken the species, but I never saw a single specimen. On 1. VIII. I took the road to the Colle della Lombarda (Italy: Prov. Cuneo), collecting on the pass itself, at around 2200 m. On the short grasses of alpine pastures various butterflies were seen, but *Erebia aethiopella* was not among them. But a few hundred meters from where I had stopped and to the west, I came upon small stands of very tall grasses, and here the first, rather few, specimens of *aethiopella mediterranea* were taken. The association of the butterfly with this grass, presumbly a *Festuca,* was obvious, and I therefore looked for areas with this tall grass, driving slowly downhill again towards Venádio. At an elevation of 2050 m (altimeter reading), I struck a large area where this *Festuca* was growing in profusion, and also immediately found a very large colony of *aethiopella mediterranea,* where 10 or 20 specimens could be observed at a glance. Both sexes were fully out, some of the males already slightly over, the females very fresh. The biotope was a stony, predominantly grassy, hill with some dwarf junipers and a fair number of blueberry stands; but the tall *Festuca* was certainly the predominant botanical feature. I observed the *aethiopella* females particularly carefully, and was rewarded by seeing a female oviposit on the tall grass. The only other butterflies seen in this area were *Erebia melampus* (Fuessli 1775) and *Mellicta varia* (Meyer-Dür 1851).

At the time I carefully collected one entire plant, pressed it between sheets of newspaper, and took it home. Later I sent the pressed grass to Dr. I. Markgraf-Dannenberg of the Botanischer Garten und Institut

für Systematische Botanik of the University of Zürich for identification. She has determined it positively as a specimen of *Festuca paniculata* (L.) Schinz & Tell, and added a note in which she informed me that *F. paniculata* is a mediterranean mountain-plant, which obviously fits the distribution of this *Erebia* species very well. I wish to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Markgraf-Dannenberg for her assistance.

While the above record and observations may not be acceptable as a definitive record to some – purists may reasonably suggest that no larvae were found feeding on the plant in nature – I believe it is at least a strong indication that *F. paniculata* is most likely the foodplant of *Erebia aethiopella mediterranea*. Since *aethiopella* is a distinctly local butterfly, it probably has a rather high foodplant specificity, and it appears at least likely that the same foodplant will be found to serve the nominate race as well.

References

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