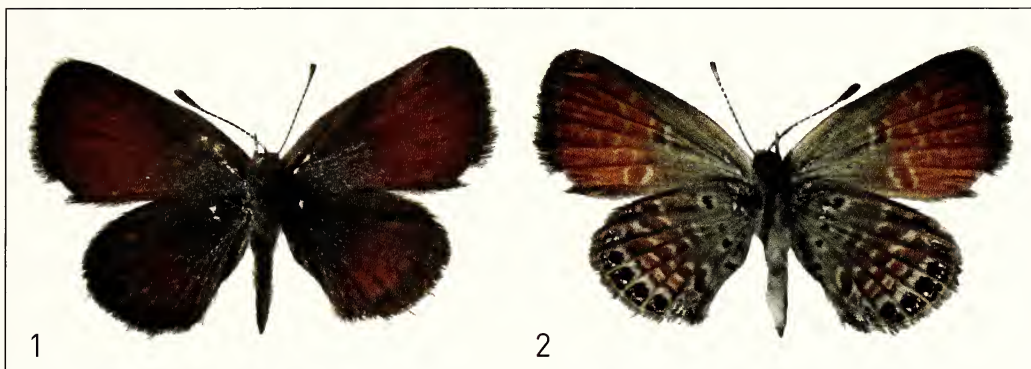


Recent geographic range expansion of *Brephidium exilis* (Boisduval, 1852) (Lycaenidae) in Oman, Arabian Peninsula

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Figs 1, 2. *Brephidium exilis* (Boisduval), 27 November 2008, Qurm, Oman. 1. recto. 2. verso.

On 27 November 2008 I caught one specimen of a tiny lycaenid butterfly (wingspan 16 mm, Figs 1, 2) at Qurm, a little settlement west of Muscat, the capital of Oman. The insect was flying over a more or less disturbed and untidy roadside. The species could not be identified with the existing works on Arabian butterflies (Larsen & Larsen 1980; Pittaway 1985). But many butterfly species in the Arabian Peninsula are of Afrotropical origin (Larsen & Larsen 1980; Larsen 1984). The next step was searching recent literature on African butterflies (Larsen 1996, 2005) without result. In Penninton's Butterflies (Dickson 1978), I found at last the genus *Brephidium* with the species *metophis* Wallengren, 1860, an endemic and very small lycaenid from South Africa, whose appearance was very similar to my Oman butterfly. However, it was not the same species!

A search on the internet showed that genus *Brephidium* also occurs in North America, where it is represented by several species. Comparison with existing photos on the site 'Butterflies of America' (Warren et al. 2009) identified my Oman lycaenid as the Western Pygmy Blue *Brephidium exilis* (Boisduval, 1852). To confirm my diagnosis, I sent photographs to Andrew D. Warren, one of the authors of this site. His answer was very clear: "Yes, you do appear to have *Brephidium exilis*". He also kindly drew my attention to a paper dealing with this species in the Emirates (Larsen 2000).

Torben Larsen sent me an excellent paper by Pittaway et al. (2006), where one record of *Brephidium exilis* was published from the extreme north of Oman: Buraimi & Mahdah. In the same paper a survey is given on the distribution of this lycaenid in the Arabian Peninsula, where it has been found in Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Oman.



It is suggested that the butterfly was accidentally introduced during the early 1990s through the import of North American halophytes (Pittaway et al. 2006).

My record suggests the species is still extending its range in Oman since Qurm is situated much further south than Buraimi (near Al Ain). It will be very interesting to follow this tiny species in its efforts to occupy other suitable habitats.

Fig. 3. Map of Oman with the two localities of *Brephidium exilis* (Boisduval).

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the help I obtained from various people, in particular Torben Larsen, Jaap van Leeuwen of Natuurhistorisch Museum Rotterdam (mapdesign), Robert Robbins, Frans Slieker (photos), and Andrew D. Warren.

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Jahr/Year: 2010

Band/Volume: [33](#)

Autor(en)/Author(s): Vis Ruud

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