

## Butterflies and moths at sea

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In the course of two long voyages butterflies and moths were observed far at sea, and the following notes from the diaries might shed some light on the flying ability and habits of these small insects.

On my first voyage I was ship's doctor on board the M/S "Chile" (Johnson Lines, 12,000 tons). It sailed from Gothenburg to Brazil and Argentine, with stop-overs in Gran Canaria, from the 24th August to the 3rd November, 1952, when we returned to Sweden.

Outward bound in the middle of the Channel and again the next day about 20 kilometers off Brittany many *Autographa gamma* L. (Silver Y) were seen round the shelter of the stern.

One or two days later in the middle of the Bay of Biscay a *Vanessa atalanta* L. (Red Admiral) was seen near the ship. Theoretically, it may have been with us from Sweden, but more likely it was a migrating specimen like the *gamma*-moths.

On the 10th October a beautiful specimen of *Aglais urticae* L. (Small Tortoise-shell) (1) flew about the ship's saloon, when we were approx. 50 kilometers east of southern Brazil. The Small Tortoise-shell is not found in South America and on the Canary Islands, and the animal did in fact look like an ordinary European specimen. It must have been a stowaway, who had sought and found winter quarters at the ship in Sweden's approaching fall, and had now been waked by the summer heat of the southern hemisphere.

During the second voyage the observations were also rather interesting. As guests of the owner we were on board Høegh Lines' oil tankers (30,000 tons) from Greece to Sydney and back to Norway. Both times we took in oil at the head of the Persian Gulf.

We went out on board the M/S "Høegh Grace" from the 17th February to the 27th March and returned on board the M/S "Høegh Forum" from the 18th June to the 17th August, 1964.

On our way to Australia we were not moving for 24 hours on the 27th February 60 kilometers south of Arabia. The sea was dead calm, and it was burning hot. When we came on deck from our air-conditioned cabin, it felt like entering an oven. That night *Spodoptera exigua* Hb. (Small Mottled Willow) (2) in great numbers were attracted by the lights of the ship.

Both on our way out and on our way back, i.e. in February and in July, *Cynthia cardui* L. (Painted Lady) followed us through the Suez Canal and the Red Sea. I caught one specimen in the Suez Canal on the 22nd July (3) and another half-way between Malta and Sicily on the 25th July (4), both flawless and of the palaearctic type ; the latter must have been a migrating specimen.

However, my most remarkable find was a newly dead specimen (5) lying on deck in the morning of the 6th July. We were on our way back and had been sailing for two weeks, thousands of kilometers from shore.

For six days a gale had been blowing from the southwest, and we were off Bombay hundreds of kilometers to the east. (At night every wind-swept crest was phosphorescent, and it was like flying over an illuminated city).

The nearest country in the direction of the wind was Somalia with Cap Guardafui at a distance of min. 2,000 kilometers.

But was the find of this Painted Lady not a parallel to the Small Tortoiseshell from the South Atlantic ?

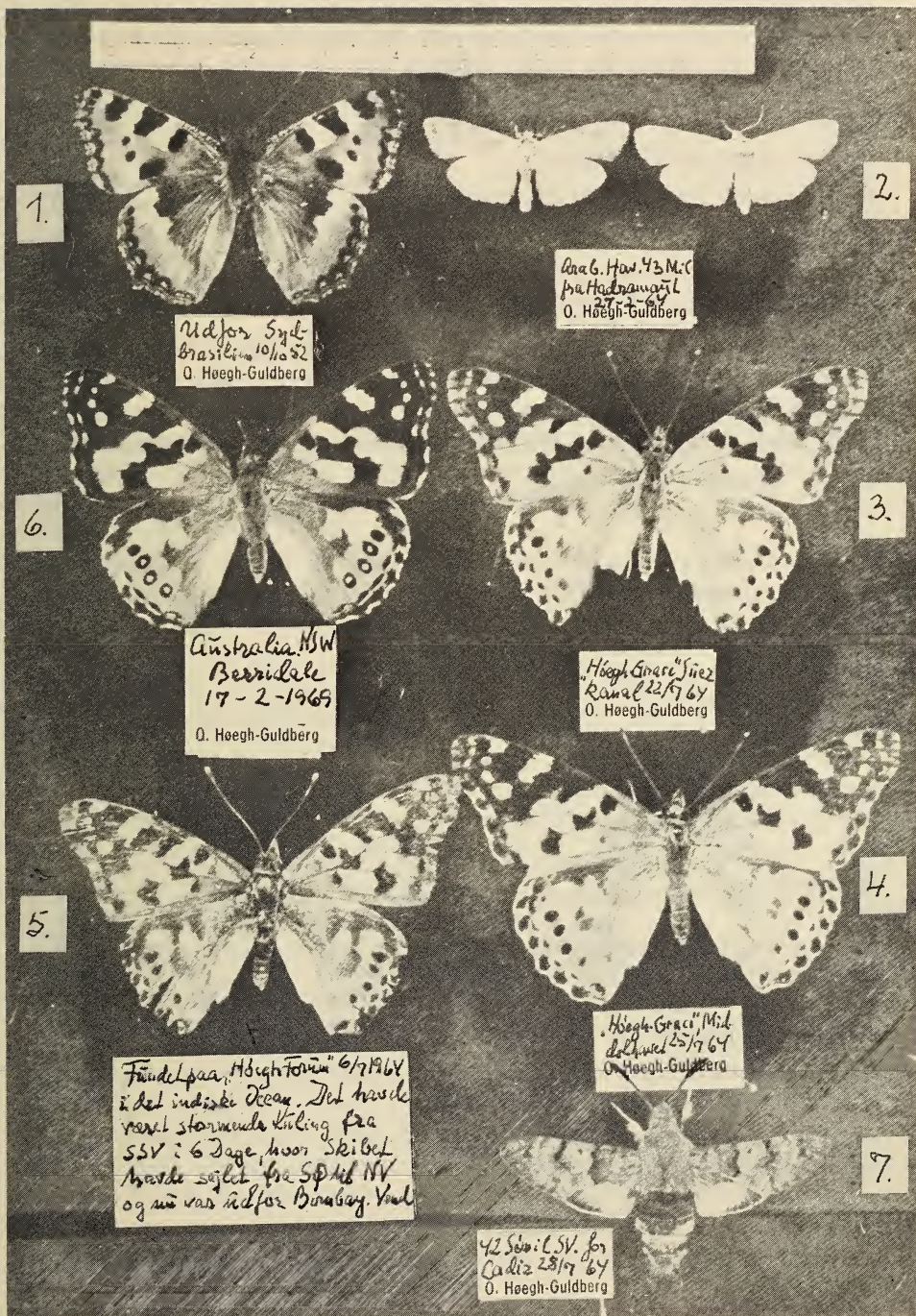
No, because it was of the European-African race and not of *f. kershawi* McCoy (6), as the common Australian form (species ?) is called and which, contrary to our *cardui*, always has blue centres in the postdiscal spots of the upper side of the hind wing.

Could it be a Swedish *cardui* which had gone to Australia with us and was now on its way back ? No, that does not fit in with neither the habits of the species nor the departure of the ship from Sweden in March-April. Theoretically, it could be a stowaway from the ship's outward passage through the Red Sea, but the Painted Lady is not in the habit of taking long periods of rest as imago.

Consequently, what we have here is a non-stop tail wind flyer having covered at least 2,000 kilometers without the possibility of a stop ! That must be something of a record.

In Australia the Bogong Moth (*Agrotis infusa* Boisd.) is found in huge numbers. After having spent the summer in the cooler mountain areas, the swarms return to the lowland in the fall. On the 20th June (late fall)





when our ship in fair weather sailed through the Bass Strait (between the Australian mainland and Tasmania), the deck was blotted with sea gull's droppings, all containing partly digested Bogong Moths. Most likely a swarm of moths had made a forced landing at sea, and the gulls have gorged themselves with the drowned animals, which have, it seems, proved rather hard to digest.

In the Atlantic off Cadiz, 60 kilometers from shore, I took a fine specimen of *Macroglossum stellatarum* L. (Humming-bird Hawk) (7).

And last at the beginning of August off Hoek van Holland a *Mesapamea secalis* L. (Common Rustic) came to the lights of the ship.

It is easy to observe butterflies on board a big ship, but to catch them is difficult as well as tiring. When the animal is down on deck, you are on the 4th floor, and after having hurried down the many stairs you find more often than not that it has flown to the place you just came from.

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## Research

I am looking for references (place and date) as well as breeding material of *Coenonympha corinna* HBN.

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