Welcome to Spring!

A huge vote of thanks to our financial members – what a wonderful way to start the season, to have such a huge show of support from you all.

Our membership has grown in leaps and bounds, and given us the critical momentum to embark on at least one of the projects on our wish list:

- Education campaign in libraries
- Updated website with information and photographs of NZ moths and butterflies

One month into the new year and we have almost the same amount of members we had for the whole of last year.

We are thrilled with the high level of support we’ve received lately – thank you for having such faith in us; this gives us a huge leg up with our projects.

Also, the Association for Butterflies, based in the USA, has made a generous donation to our tagging project as well. Thank you! You can read more about them on their website [www.forbutterflies.org](http://www.forbutterflies.org).

In this newsletter there’s a report from Chrissie Ward who worked with a team of willing volunteers at the EcoFest in Nelson recently to promote awareness of Lepidoptera in the area. (Two volunteers are shown above.)

Jane gives us another inspirational and ‘common sense’ article about butterfly gardening in this issue. Don’t you always want to get out into the garden and make improvements every time you read her ideas? I visited Jane’s garden midwinter and it is obvious the amount of forethought that had gone into planning for the spring.

Read also about the activities of some of our members in Palmerston North – so much inspirational and positive reading in this newsletter.

*The Trustees*
Caterpillar Castles

Caterpillar castles are great to have indoors so you can view the life cycle of whatever species of butterfly or other insect you are raising. Collapsible, lightweight and durable, they fold almost flat. The fabric draws away moisture fast to keep contents dry. They are washable and can be treated with 10% bleach to sanitise before reuse. A large zippered opening gives easy access and a clear vinyl full-side window easy viewing of contents. Fine mesh sides promote healthy air flow but will stop ants, wasps and other predators. They come in two sizes, and we usually have them in stock.

Jumbo: 60 cm x 60 cm x 90 cm, $45 for members, $50 for non-members, plus $10 for P&P.
Large: 33 cm x 33 cm x 60 cm, $25 for members, $30 for non-members, plus $5 for P&P.

Payment with order please to PO Box 44100, Pt Chevalier, 1246 OR send us an email and pay to the MBNZT account with Kiwibank, 38 9009 0654693 00.

Cinnabar Moths

The bright crimson colour of the Cinnabar moth (*Tyria jacobaeae*) reminds me of a flamenco dancer. This day-flying Arctiid moth originated from Europe and western and central Asia. The Arctiidae family are large and diverse, around 11,000 species worldwide.
It gets its name after the red mineral cinnabar because of the similarity in colour. They were introduced into this country around 1929, with releases at many sites in Auckland, Taranaki, Nelson and Southland. However, it didn’t do well in the north or the south but has had some success in the central regions. You are more likely to see them if you live in the lower half of the North Island, and the top half of the South Island where they have had a very good summer.
The moths are about 20 mm long with a wingspan of 30-40 mm. Hind wings are entirely crimson, and each forewing has a crimson stripe and two marginal spots. They are not very active fliers, and females in particular usually travel only a metre or so at a time.
Clusters of 30-50 spherical yellow eggs can be found on the undersides of ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*) leaves. The eggs take about two weeks to hatch into tiny, inconspicuous yellowish caterpillars. But as they grow they develop smooth, bold, yellow and black stripes and can be found on the upper parts of the plant. Best time to look is between December and February.

To move Cinnabar caterpillars from one site to another cut ragwort leaves with medium to large caterpillars on them and put these into a chilly bin. The more caterpillars you can move, the greater the chance that they will establish in the new site. Make sure that the ragwort in the new location has not been heavily grazed or sprayed with pesticide. Just like the Monarch, the bright colours of both larvae and adults act as a warning sign so that they are seldom eaten by predators – they absorb bitter-tasting alkaloids from the sap of the plants. Smaller Senecio species such as groundsel (*S. vulgaris*) are sometimes used as host plants.

Our native Magpie Moth (*Nyctemera annulata*) is also found on ragwort. The eggs are difficult to distinguish from Cinnabars. Their hairy caterpillars are often referred to as ‘woolly bears’.

Photo thanks to Crow’s Eye Photography
Seeds for the Butterfly Garden

With spring now in the air it is time to think of seed sowing and scattering, and there are many fantastic varieties of flowers, loved by butterflies, that are easy to grow from seed.

First think about what type of area you have to grow some flowers and perhaps a few swan plants for the Monarchs and a patch of nettles for the Admirals.

To get a head start on the season it may pay to buy a couple of swan plants and allow them to grow tall at the back, and, while waiting for that to happen have some more coming along from seed as a follow up strategy for the big rush of caterpillars later in the season.

For the front of the same border the smaller *Asclepias curassavica* will provide more leaves for those caterpillars to eat, and the flowers come in a lovely range of colours from gold through to orange and red.

Put the taller-growing plants at the back and the shorter ones at the front for a pleasing look and easier maintenance.

Seeds can be purchased from a number of places including your local garden centre and the Monarch Butterfly NZ Trust. For those of you who like to purchase online, there are some excellent suppliers of seed on Trade Me who will do a deal on postage and quantity if you buy more than a couple of packets.

I have purchased online from many of these traders over the years and have never been let down yet (she says looking for wood to touch).

For those who like to peruse catalogues I would recommend Kings Seed catalogue. If you are a first time customer they will charge you for the first one, but after regular ordering it will just arrive in the post.

Kings have an extensive range of seeds for everything from vegetables to sprouts, gourmet foods, and their flower range is very extensive with many choices within any species. They supply smaller quantities for the small garden, or field selections which will cover very large areas and are suitable for roadside plantings, understory orchard plantings, fields of flowers and naturalising in wasteland areas.

To begin with try something spectacular that will provide you with seed for next year and will enthral you this summer – sunflowers. Go for a few tall ones at the back – the butterflies love them. Try Ageratum, Asters, Bergamots, Cosmos, Coreopsis, Cleome, Cornflowers, Dahlias, Echinacea, Gaillardia, and Helianthus. All are high in nectar and loved by bees and butterflies. If you have more space left go for Larkspurs, Lupins, Marigolds, Mignonette and Nasturtium. Poppies of all kinds are easy and will obligingly self seed for next year. Salvias of every kind! Lastly try not to do without Rudbeckia – sticky with nectar and gorgeous, and sunflowers of all kinds. If your garden gets heat and is prone to dry or even poor soil – Zinnias!

Now if there isn’t room for all that – then
dig up that lawn – most butterflies don’t like lawns much.

Now a word of advice about the white butterfly. For those of you thinking about a vege patch this spring, you could do what I do, and grow only the summer veges like beans, spinach, tomatoes, pumpkins, Zucchini, and all the heat tolerant veges.

Avoid the brassica (*Cruciferae*) family of cabbage, caulif, broccoli, turnip etc so that you don’t have to spray anything this summer!

If you like to see thousands of white butterflies in your vege patch decimating the cabbages, caulis and broccoli then go right ahead and plant them this spring.

The best way to avoid the decimation is to plant your brassicas in March. The white butterfly lifecycle will be finished in April. Grow your cabbages and caulis throughout the winter when there are NO beans and tomatoes) and no white butterflies either.

That doesn’t mean you won’t see any, I still get plenty flying over my patch, but they have to look to the wasteland and lay their eggs outside the gate on the wild radishes and escaped brassica cover crops from the previous year.

White butterflies are pretty and plenty of them still visit the Buddleia, but I get to eat my food before they do!

Happy gardening and happy seed scattering.

*Jane*

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**Certified butterfly garden/habitats**

It’s time to think about Certified Butterfly Garden/Habitats. This initiative started two years ago to recognise those with the ideal garden or habitat for butterflies and moths.

Plaques have been awarded so far to Te Puna Quarry Park, Verran Road School, West Lynn Garden and Earthlore. Proclaiming for all to see that their property is what it is: ideal habitat for selected species of butterflies and moths.

“We believe that other people – gardeners and land-owners – will be encouraged to create more butterfly habitat, or to visit certified areas to see how they can make their own space more attractive,” said Norm Twigge, chairman.

“There are some wonderful species of butterflies and moths in NZ that any of us can encourage once we understand what they need.”

Before applying for certification, gardens or habitats should meet the following criteria:

- either privately owned or public spaces, e.g. owned by council, landcare groups, schools etc;
- outdoor landscapes
- have host plants for at least three Lepidoptera species;
- have nectar plants for all seasons of the year;
- have evergreen shelter trees of appropriate height on southern side of garden;
- have water for puddling;
- have signage on display (noticeboard, website, brochure or whatever) as to what plants were planted for what species (hosts) and/or nectar during what season of the year (to inspire and encourage others to keep a continuity of planting);
- predators and parasites are discouraged by natural means;
- have been established for two or three seasons; and
- be able to provide evidence such as photographs, references etc.

We encourage applicants to ensure their space has been planted up for more than one season; planting for butterflies and/or moths needs ongoing commitment and perseverance.

Similarly as the idea is to boost numbers of NZ’s endemic and native species, indoor habitats with tropical species do not qualify.

If you have a butterfly garden or habitat (don’t forget: moths too!) of which you are proud, and if you believe it meets the above criteria, the application form is downloadable from our website.

Alternatively, an email sent to trust@monarch.org.nz and we will let you know the next steps.

*Butterflies love lots of variety - plants, colour, shape, height, shelter, shade/sun.*

*Jane’s garden is the perfect space for butterflies.*
**Butterfly Diseases**

In the last issue I began an article on diseases of Lepidoptera, giving the basics of how to be aware in case a colony you are raising is affected. In this the second part, I cover some diseases – and some more tips.

The most common disease in raising Monarch butterflies is the protozoan *Ophryocystis elektroscirrha* (or Oe). Oe is present in Monarch butterflies all over NZ. Symptoms usually make themselves apparent when colonies are under stress, and include lack of mobility, reduced appetite, spotted and discoloured larvae and pupae. Butterflies will often have difficulty emerging from the pupal case.

Oe is an obligate parasite, that is, it must live within its host to replicate. Adult butterflies with Oe can appear healthy and live a normal life.

You will find more information about Oe on sites such as [www.butterflyfunfacts.com](http://www.butterflyfunfacts.com). Another useful website is [www.monarchparasites.org](http://www.monarchparasites.org).

*Nuclear polyhedrosis virus* (Npv) is a virus that can affect butterfly farmers. It usually causes larvae or pupae to melt or wilt. Many people simply destroy their stock, sterilise everything and start again.

Larvae which die from Npv usually climb to a high point, hang by their middle prolegs and die in an inverted V. A foul odour will surround the colony, and there is a loss of appetite, diarrhoea, darker skin, sluggish movement and mortality. Larvae will often weaken and stretch out so that the caterpillars can be several centimetres long. But then the signs and symptoms of Npv relate to other diseases too!

Caterpillars need to ingest this virus to be infected. One ruptured Npv-infected larva contains over a quarter of a billion virus particles which could spread throughout a garden or rearing operation!

Fortunately, like Oe, it does not cause problems to human health.

Whether you can identify the disease or not, it’s important to put an immediate plan in place to clean up the affected area. If you do find diseased material or infected caterpillars, destroy them with care. A sealed plastic bag and into the rubbish is the best method.

So – if you have what you suspect is a disease, isolate the suspects from the main colony and then try different methods of addressing the problem. You will need to have a ‘control’ group that is entirely untreated so that you will know if it works or not.

Remember plants can also become toxic such as through long periods without water, high levels of plant pests or other stressors. Mechanical damage can also happen to larvae and pupae; for example, if a caterpillar walks over a J-ing caterpillar minute tears on the skin may occur, weakening the outside of the pupa and causing deformation. The butterfly may not be able to emerge safely. Or, on occasion, strands of silk may become caught on the caterpillar restricting the shedding or splitting of skin when it makes its J.

Several people over recent years have tried disinfecting eggs, removing most pathogens from the surface of the egg. Female Monarchs will have Oe spores on their abdomen which are transmitted to the egg when she is laying. You do not need to remove the egg from the leaf. In a solution of 5% bleach to 95% water, soak eggs for one minute in the solution and then rinse in clear water for at least one minute.

You can also disinfect pupae in the same way.

Now is the time to be planting your plants for this butterfly season. You can start seedlings under cover and with the right conditions you’ll have large healthy plants when they’re needed. You’ll also be confident that they haven’t been sprayed with insecticide!

One warning from butterfly-farmers around the world is entirely relevant to us in a NZ situation – not to try anything new without testing it on a portion of the colony. A procedure may work well in one situation but not necessarily in another. This is much more important where you are governed by legislation, but humidity, temperature and individual habits can also have a bearing on practice.

We are thankful to the Association for Butterflies for putting together the course as it is invaluable for any butterfly-farmer, no matter how large or small their operation is – and we are grateful to Charlotte Beesley and Lyn Ridge for being the ‘guinea pigs’ and taking the course.
The Monarch arrives in NZ

I often get asked when the Monarch first came to New Zealand – and, how did it get here.

It is known that during the mid- to second half of the 19th Century the Monarch spread from North America throughout the Pacific, colonising both small islands and larger landmasses, such as Australia and NZ. According to a paper prepared by Myron P Zalucki and Anthony R Clarke and published in the Biological Journal of the Linnean Society in 2004, Monarch butterflies were present in NZ as early as 1840, possibly earlier.

It is known that butterflies establish populations in new countries as a consequence of crossing oceans on severe weather fronts – part flying, part being blown. As a result, the Monarch is considered a native, as it arrived here without the intervention of people. However, records of sightings of Monarchs in the early days in NZ are difficult and have tended to be downplayed, perhaps in part because they do not fit with ‘conventional wisdom’ of how butterflies may have spread and also because the published records occur so long after the reputed sightings.

The first records apparently come from Austrian-born botanist and horticulturist F W C Sturm, who established a plant nursery in Napier in about 1865 where he grew fruit trees, berries and vines and built stone retaining walls. In 1878 he noted sightings of Monarch butterflies that he had seen anywhere between ten and 38 years earlier.

Early writers considered the Monarch endemic to NZ, with one writer referring to older Maori who were insistent that the butterfly was present before Europeans arrived. The fact that the Maori had a traditional name for the insect, kākāhū, certainly suggests it was not then a recent arrival. It is possible that the Monarch had arrived here some time during prehistory, although the pathway is certainly not clear. Even if the Monarch was a more recent arrival, there is no obvious reason from the contemporary literature to dismiss these reports as invalid records.

From the paper published by the Linnean Society the earliest sightings are noted as: Hawkes Bay, NZ (1840s), Tonga (1863) and Vanuatu/New Caledonia (1868) and Australia: Sydney (1870) and Brisbane (1871).

There is another argument: because Sturm’s report cannot be substantiated or proven, it is not accepted as science and merely a hypothesis. Will we ever know?

Here’s a clever idea - seen in Cleveland, Queensland by Anna Barnett – a hedge that has been trimmed into a caterpillar – with street lights as antennae.
Nelson Ecofest, 20-21 August 2011

If it’s August, it must be Ecofest! For the fourth year running, local volunteers ran a stand for MBNZT at this two-day event, which describes itself as a ‘home and garden show with a green conscience’.

There were slightly fewer stands at the show this year, and attendance numbers were also down – 5,000 visitors over the weekend as against 6,000 in previous years. The organiser explained this as being due to ‘the state of the economy’, so it will be interesting to see whether things pick up in 2012.

It is probably just as well that visitor numbers weren’t greater than last year, as there were fewer of us on the stand. Stalwart Rae Herd, my partner Tony Staufer and I tended the stand over both days, while Mary Willett kindly came in over lunchtime so that we could have a bite to eat and look at the other stands. Exhibits ranged from the very high tech (e.g. solar panels) to the very low (e.g. worm farms). I like to think that Lepidoptera fit – or flit – somewhere in between!

Of course our primary purpose is to provide information and as usual we spent most of our time talking to people and answering questions. All back copies of the newsletter went, as did uncounted numbers of the Trust’s pamphlet. We directed people to the website as a source of information, and we hope that some of them will join as a result.

The two most common queries were “What should I plant in my garden to encourage butterflies?” and “How do you tell the difference between native and African praying mantises?” To answer the first we had some handouts about nectar plants, and also sold all 20 packets of the Trust’s butterfly mix. To answer the second query we had photographs to illustrate the differences between the species. Rae had brought along a very small African mantis she recently found in her garden, and we also had examples of the African and native egg cases. With luck, more Nelsonians will now be ‘squishing’ one and treasuring the other.

Our locally harvested swan plant seeds proved very popular, so much so that we had to package up some more on Saturday evening. We also sold quite a few nectar and caterpillar food plants, as well as items supplied by the Trust. Potter Anna Barnett provided first prize for the raffle – a gift box of three ceramic butterflies (see next page) designed to be hung on the wall. (Check out Anna’s work on www.nelsonpotters.co.nz/profile/anna-barnett.) The second raffle prize, a pack of three lovely wines, was provided by loyal supporter Lars Jensen of Richmond Plains wine (www.richmondplains.co.nz).

Rae and I put the third prize together; I thought of it as a ‘paper pack’, as it consisted of a wastepaper bin, cards and serviettes, all decorated with butterfly designs. The man who won this had obviously forgotten what the prize was...
when I delivered it, but he remarked to his wife, “Oh, this is nice!”

The people who called at our stand were also very nice. Some of them were extremely generous, for example the man (a MBNZT member) who said “No, I won’t take a raffle ticket, but have this” – and handed me a $10 note. Several other people didn’t want their change for small purchases.

One incident stands out as special. We had the Monarch pins displayed for sale in a pretty little lidded box provided by Rae. When we left at 5pm on Saturday evening I closed the box; when I opened the lid on Sunday morning I was astonished to find a $5 note inside and a message saying: “Bought a pin and a packet of seeds, thanks.”

I have no idea who that honest person was, but I hope they enjoy wearing the pin and that they grow lots of healthy swan plants!

Chrissie Ward

And thanks to all of you for your part in the show, Chrissie, Mary, Rae and Tony. Not only the trustees, but I am sure our members appreciate your efforts – and it will have gone a long way to help our butterflies and moths in your region.

Kiwiana Butterflies

Many houses in the ’50s and ’60s had these Monarch butterflies on exterior walls – they’re now a part of Kiwiana history.

These replicas are made for us in Taranaki from treated plywood and are proving to be very popular. Recently we sold a large order to the newly opened Downunder Bar at the Auckland International Airport; they look stunning there (see below).

You can buy them directly from us, or off Trade Me. Prices are: Giant 620 mm wide, $70; Huge 520 mm wide, $60; Large 420 mm wide, $50; Medium 320 mm wide, $40; Small 220 mm wide, $30 all prices need P&P added. They are also available in different primary colours – choose one to match (or clash with) your house! And the smaller ones are ideal for a little girl’s dolls house.
2012 Calendars

Our calendars are in production but it’s not too late to order. Last orders must be in by the end of September – payment with order please, either in the mail ($20 each, includes an envelope for you to mail them on to friends as Christmas gifts) or by internet banking. If paying by internet please quote your surname, postcode and ‘calendar’, and send a confirmation email detailing your payment to trust@monarch.org.nz.

The 2011 calendar proved to be a great way of raising funds for our projects – and this one is even better. You can see last year’s calendar on our website.

Pictured are two of the featured butterflies: the Forest Ringlet and the Boulder Copper.

Introduce two friends - FREE seeds for you!

Here’s an offer that we think will appeal to you.

We want to tell other New Zealanders how fragile our Lepidoptera species are – and how they can help – so we’re encouraging you to invite two friends to become financial members. And until the end of October, if you introduce two friends, they can take out an ‘on line’ subscription for HALF PRICE!

That’s right – it will be only $10 each for them to become a member for the full 2011-2012 year.

And to reward you for the introduction, we will give YOU one free packet of milkweed seed for each two members you introduce. Introduce FOUR friends, and we will reward you with TWO packets of milkweed seed.

Please pay by internet banking and email their full name(s) and address details including postcode to treasurer@monarch.org.nz, and tell us which of the following seeds you would like:

- *Gomphocarpus physocarpus* (Giant swan plant)
- *Asclepias curassavica* tropical milkweed ‘Scarlet’
- *Asclepias curassavica* tropical milkweed ‘Gold’
- *Asclepias incarnata* Pink (swamp milkweed)

The deadline is 31 October! Be in, quick!!

Lucky Draw Winners

Here are the names of the lucky people who renewed/joined before the end of July and won the lucky draws.

- Twin-packs of *Richmond Plains Wines* went to Eileen Colleen Albert, Alex Giblin and Janet Shaw.
- *Wally Ones* went to Mary Blake, Ngaire & Paddy O’Brien and Yvonne Wallis.
- *Hamper of Barker’s Fine Products* went to Christine & Michael Cradock.
- ‘Managing Pests and Diseases’ went to Brenda & John Briand.
- ‘Nana Helen and the ’mazing Monarch Butterfly’ went to Olwyn Anderson.

We have had some wonderful feedback from the lucky winners. Yvonne, who received a Wally One said “As I have limited floor space in my ‘in progress makeshift butterfly house’ this will use the otherwise un-utilised higher wall area. I will probably put nettles, groundsel or cinerarias in mine... Cinerarias would be colourful, great for my Magpie Moths and would be further out of reach for any slugs and snails if they find there way in...”

If you missed out, never fear... we might come up with some other initiatives in the future to encourage you to help us with our fundraising.

Annual Accounts and AGM

The end of financial year accounts have been prepared and are currently being audited. They should be available for viewing on our website shortly. They will be presented at the Annual General Meeting in the New Year – most probably in March. More information in our Summer newsletter.
Do you have seeds to spare?

We’re on the lookout for milkweed seeds – swan plant, giant swan, tropical milkweed and/or swamp milkweed. We are able to sell these, and it is a very useful fundraiser for the MBNZT.

It is important to collect them when they are absolutely ripe (that is, the day that they pop open and get scattered on the wind, or the day before that). If you can remove the fluff and any other ‘stuff’ including wildlife like mites, and send them to us clearly labelled, we do appreciate it. Please tell us which plant they have come from, the season they were collected, and also your name.

Not only do we sell the seed, but much is given away to schools. To help keep them dry store them in paper boxes or paper bags – not plastic – and the chemist or local shoe shop will be happy to recycle desiccants, those little ‘packages’ that keep things dry.

Also, if you have nectar plants going to seed and don’t mind sharing the seeds, these are also very useful.

Hope you can help, and thank you to all those who have done so to date.

Social Media

Did you know that the Monarch Butterfly NZ Trust has a page on Facebook? Facebook users, just click on this link http://tinyurl.com/3sz5cf2 and ‘like’ the page, and you’ll be kept updated.

We’re not on Twitter... yet.

On our wish list is someone to progress these social media and work on other issues to do with our website including setting up new income streams through product sales. For example, people want to buy our T-shirts and it would be made so much easier if they could go to an on line site and process an order for the size, shape, colour and other specifications, just as they want. There are also items such as carrier bags and tea towels...

If you have better than average computer skills, are keen to learn more about the latest technology – and have 2-3 hours a week free, this might interest you.

For more information please email trust@monarch.org.nz.

Creative on the Kapiti Coast

At Lindale Farm Park on the Kapiti Coast, things are humming along nicely for ‘Butterfly World’. At Butterfly World they aim to be the leading producer/conservator of butterflies in NZ. Dave Christie says that the Monarch has introduced many people to the wonders of nature, biodiversity and conservation.

“It teaches respect and understanding about NZ’s flora and fauna,” he said, “and adds a special touch to many events.”

Also on the Kapiti Coast, long-term member Ron Pincott has been lobbying the local council to plant swan plants in public gardens, beginning outside the library. His campaign has been well received and his efforts continue. For some years now Ron has distributed free swan plant seed around Kapiti Coast schools.

Motivated in the Manawatu

Paul Vandenberg in Palmerston North is encouraging a band of volunteers to help him create a butterfly garden with the blessing of the Palmerston North City Council.

The garden will be in a corner of Apollo Park, where Monarchs are already known to overwinter. The focus is on NZ plants that are known to provide nectar for butterflies, and to include host plants for Copper butterflies and Admirals.

Paul says there will be “lots of sedges/grasses around the borders, and plenty of hardy Hebes, particularly Hebe salicifolia, also known as Koromiko, a large Hebe that our Admirals just love”.

Paul has already set up a page on Facebook and attracted the support of business colleagues. A small working party got together on the first Saturday in September and cleaned up a walkway. Good on you, Paul and colleagues.

Owner wanted: $$$

From time to time people make deposits to the bank account of the Monarch Butterfly New Zealand Trust, and either forget to give us information as to who they are, or what they are wanting – or their email goes astray.

As a result, they will be missing out on a receipt and we are unable to send them the items they have requested.

If you know of someone who believes they have missed out on a communication from us, please ask them to email treasurer@monarch.org.nz and fill us in!
Memories of Butterflies

I recently asked some of our members what their earliest memories of butterflies were. The exercise produced some interesting answers:

Many remembered being on ‘White Butterfly patrol’ in their parents’ vegetable gardens.

Barbara M said “My earliest memories would be of dad being annoyed with them but me being so pleased because I hated cabbage and figured if the butterflies ate them I wouldn’t have to.”

Harry W added that he ‘had a tennis racquet and earned pocket money for every fifty killed — there was little skill (or compassion) involved in killing half a dozen at every swipe’.

He also remembers ‘the car radiator being covered with them when driving in Hawkes Bay summers. The numbers are no longer like that now — whether from climate or insecticides or plant breeding’. This was in the early 40’s when their vegetable garden lay ‘under continuous clouds of white butterflies’.

Growing up in Wellington, Ron P remembers that the damage done by the hungry caterpillars to cabbages, cauliflowers and even the leaves of Swedes ‘was awful’.

“Derris dust was the only product available to deal with the pest and that only lasted until the next rain.”

He, along with his sister, were encouraged to give them the tennis racquet treatment, until ‘...in the 1940s a parasite, the braconid wasp, was introduced and in a few years proved very effective in reducing the white butterfly numbers’.

Winsome D discovered that ‘...the White butterflies slept at night on the long grass on the roadside’.

“So we started catching them by the dozens. But instead of getting paid a penny or so per half dozen, we got a penny for several dozen.”

In the Twigge family, Norm was also expected to be on patrol, but his work was short lived when ‘Dad noticed some of the cabbages looking rather battered’.

Those poor white butterflies! His recollections continued:

“About age 10 my friend and I were catching white butterflies in a home-made net and while one held their wings open the other was dabbing red and blue splotches of artist’s oil paints (quietly borrowed from my sister) on the wings and then releasing them, and fondly imagining someone would get excited about a rare butterfly they had seen.”

When Rae H was seven, her father managed a Nelson orchard. She recalls nasturtiums growing along the sunny side of the house:

“The Cabbage White used to visit and even then we were encouraged to squash their fat green caterpillars. Not so the Magpie moth caterpillars. I don’t recall seeing the moth but the little black fluffy bums (caterpillars) were often seen scurrying about and have always been a favourite. There was a verandah on the front of the house where a daisy bush [with small white flowers] grew underneath. A good spot to watch NZ preying mantises and their victims. There was a small grey/blue planthopper that also frequented the bush. Other insects in this immediate area were cicadas, huhu beetles, dragonflies, red soldiers, ladybirds, earwigs and slaters were also there.”

“By 1945 we moved about two miles to our own orchard by the sea. The house was near the middle of the orchard thus come the spraying season there were no bugs in my vegetable garden and I do not recall any butterflies nor ladybirds. Cicadas only come to mind as they would have missed the spraying season and later in the 1950s German wasps. Earwigs and slaters survived in the earth. Most insects didn’t have a chance to survive during the spraying season; as the years past the sprays also came to be more potent.”

For Caroline Garnham the White butterflies never caught her interest to the same extent as the wide range of native butterflies she would see on Waikanae beach.

Susan W remembers the Whites, but also remembers the ‘woolly bears’ of the Magpie Moth on roadside Ragwort.

One of her most vivid memories is of a ‘hatching’. She says she was probably about ten.

“Dad had been doing some trimming of a flowering gum one day and brought in some funny looking cocoons on twiggy branches. These stayed in paper bags in the hot-water cupboard, and were sort of forgotten until Mum heard what sounded like a mouse!”

“Out of one of these cocoons emerged this creature, having bitten an exit hole. Once its wings had been pumped up and dried, it was a beautiful Gum Emperor moth. It was spectacular! The huge spots on its wings, big feathery antennae! I had never seen anything like it before, or anything as large as that.”

“We got our share of moths attracted by light after dark, but this was really different! I can still visualise the photos taken of it as it rested on Mum’s hand -- and those photos were in black and white! Don’t remember seeing any caterpillars as the gum tree was too big/tall to investigate.”

Denise W’s earliest memory are of being chased around the house by her brothers holding Gum Emperor caterpillars.

“I remember being afraid of the grub but at the same time awestruck by the colours. We had gum trees on our rural property so saw many adult moths and we used to collect the fibrous cocoons from off the ground.”

“I also remember lying in a small child’s pup tent smelling the warm grass smell of midsummer, watching those tiny blue/grey butterflies dart across the grass.”

Gordon Thompson, now busy with his wife Janine creating insect habitat at Owaka, remembers thinking that White butterflies were okay ‘because he didn’t like cabbage
anyway’. The more the caterpillars ate, the less likely he would be to have it for dinner!

He can also recall watching Copper butterflies flitting about in the tussock on the mountain slopes nearby in the early evening as they set up camp. There was a large number (20-50) visible from the tent site.

“It was midsummer in the late 70’s. Since that time I have returned to the area only once, around Christmas in the mid 80’s, and I recall noting a decline in numbers.”

He observes the numbers of both Red and Yellow Admiral seem to have declined over his lifetime; reds have dropped in number and Yellows are now rarely seen.

Yvonne W’s first memorable experiences with moths, were, unfortunately, not good ones.

“Growing up on a farm there were a lot of moths but I had a particular dislike for this brown, large, fluffy, heavyset creature that my mother called a ‘wildebeest’. This name stuck and the offending little creature about 2.5 cm long would fly around like a kamikaze pilot and end up in your hair and buzzing in your ears.”

“Contrary to this previous early unpleasant childhood experience was my early lovely memories. As a child in a farm field in Karamea on the West Coast there was always an abundance of little blue and orange butterflies which I now know as being Common Blues and Coppers. They were so prolific that you took them for granted after a while, as you would do with a common fly or bee.”

“Around this time my father and sister had come in from outside brimming with excitement as a Blue Moon butterfly had landed on my sister’s shoulder and Dad had told us how it probably blew over from Australia. The rest of us sat in awe, quite envious, and wished that we could have been there to see it. I don’t know how my father knew what it was but the description was so planted in my mind that I was able to recognise it at the Dunedin Butterfly House.”

We have many more memories and will share them in future newsletters. If you would like to contribute your memories of butterflies and moths long ago, please email them to us, or write to The Editor at the PO Box.

Display in Auckland Central Library

Last month our display material was set up in the Auckland Central Library for a few weeks. The display was very popular, according to feedback from library staff.

“A good number of customers stopping to study the information on the banners and to take your informational brochures for themselves and their children,” a librarian said. “For us it was a good opportunity to link it in with a book display on butterflies, gardening to attract them into the home garden and other related subjects.”

Other Auckland branches (now that Auckland is a super city, there are over 50 libraries in the city) are interested in hosting our display. We hope to upgrade the displays with more content about NZ’s other endemic Lepidoptera.