

INFORMATION SHEET

CALM 2911.03 **WOOD WHITE BUTTERFLY** (*Delias aganippe*)

History, Distribution and Flight Periods

This species was first named in 1805 and is endemic to Australia. In S.A. it is found over most parts of the state and can be seen around the coastal areas of Adelaide and also the Mt. Lofty Ranges. It can appear throughout the year, but mostly during the warmer months. Historically some Wood Whites accompany the Caper White (*Belenois java*) during its southerly spring migrations to the settled districts.

Description and Ecology

Butterflies belong to the insect Order Lepidoptera (having scaled wings), moths are also in this group. The Wood White butterfly belongs to the Pieridae family, (Whites and Yellows). The wingspan is 61mm for males and 63mm for females. The upperside is silvery-grey or cream with black markings, but it is better known for its beautiful colourful underside markings, which are red, yellow, black and white. The eggs are yellow and are laid on the leaves (usually on the underside) of the larval food plant in large compact clusters of up to 74 eggs in a cluster.



Wood White Butterfly (*Delias aganippe*)
Photo: R. Grund

The larvae feed gregariously, especially during early instars (larval growth stages), and spin considerable amounts of silk over the leaves and branches of the food plant. The mature caterpillars are cylindrical, the black head has

white hairs, the body is brown with numerous white hairs arising from raised white spots. The

pupae are mottled brown and white with a short blunt anterior (front end) projection, a pronounced dorsal thoracic (back of body) ridge and four prominent blunt dorsal spines on the abdomen. This stage of development is called metamorphosis and lasts four or five weeks. The adult emerges from the pupal case after two to three weeks. It will spend a few hours pumping up its wings until they are rigid and ready for flight. It will then feed on flower nectar and search for a mate.

Habitat

This butterfly depends on three main food plant groups, the quandongs in the north and mistletoes and native cherries in the south. These plants are all parasitic and require a host plant. They can be seen around Pink gums (*Eucalyptus fasciculosa*), as mistletoe is common on this specie. All mistletoes are native plants and are protected under legislation.

Conservation and Threats

This visitor is now rare in the settled areas, but has been seen in the Adelaide Hills recently. They are especially attracted to the butterfly bush (*Buddleia* spp.), a garden shrub which is a great nectar source. Urbanisation and agricultural activities have destroyed or fragmented many of the known breeding areas. Chemical spraying, and loss of host plants such as mistletoes, are a continuing threat. Known breeding colonies should be left alone. As larvae are gregarious and are capable of defoliating the food plant, colonies should be monitored by interested parties and preferably some of the larvae transferred to food plants in conservation reserves.

For more information on butterflies contact David Keane, Butterfly Conservation South Australia Inc., C/-PO, Inglewood 5133 or AHC Natural Resource Management Unit on 8408 0400.