GARDENING FOR BUTTERFLIES

Attracting the Yellow Pansy (Junonia idaio ciborome) to your garden.

Text and illustrations by Jill Reid, Oudtshoorn

Aply named for the little garden flower, the Yellow Pansy butterfly is a common sight throughout most of the country except in the Karoo and Western Cape. Both males and females prefer flowers and seem to prefer small open faced varieties in the red-purple spectrum.

The females, who have more brown on their wings, and whose iridescent purple patch on the hind wing is not as large as that of the male, will often be seen hovering around their favourite larval host plant, Barleria purpurea. She plucks simple, barrel shaped green eggs in the flowers of the plant. If you are lucky enough to find these and examine them under 20x magnification, you will see the most exquisite architecture.

The males, except when feeding are difficult to identify as they fly like Kamikaze pilots along open roads in search of females. On one occasion we spotted a male flying along a dirt road in front of our bakkie. Giving chase, we reached 50 km before overtaking it. They will occasionally however, be seen warming themselves on a hot rock, where the breathtaking blue flash of the wings can be appreciated. The undersides of the Yellow Pansy’s wings are a pearlscent grey, which blends in perfectly with the surroundings when the butterfly sits with wings folded.

The larvae are black and spiny and do not visibly change their appearance after skin sheddings. Should you be fortunate enough to find a pupa, you will not be much impressed as it is a dowdy affair compared to the brilliant creature that is about to emerge.

Above, Asystasia gangetica, with Yellow Pansy pupa attached. Bottom left, Yellow Pansy larva.

Recorded larval host plants are Adiantum densiflorum, Asystasia gangetica, Barleria purpurea, Choisya ternata and Ruellia cordata (all members of the Acanthaceae family).

The gentleman who phoned wanting to know where he might obtain Ceropaeas plants to attract butterflies to his garden can get in touch with Mr. Mockford, (tel 021) 659 9012) who has a few little plants in his garden that he is willing to send to you.

Veld & Flora March 1999