

CORRESPONDENCE

Oops, I got it wrong (or so it seems!)

There was a considerable response to my suggestion in the last issue of *Antenna* (37/4) that the photographs (printed again here for those who may not have seen them originally) were of a Satyrid, possibly *Erebia*.



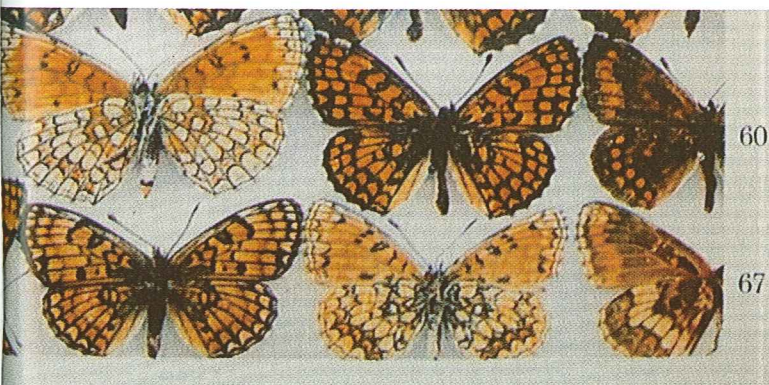
There was a spread of opinion as to its identity, but all were united in the view that it was not a Satyrid!!

I'm very grateful to all who took the trouble to contact me, either directly, or via the Editorial team, and I have been greatly enlightened by their views and suggestions.

Almost all were of the view that it was an extremely melanic small Nymphalid, although Emilio Balletto suggested *Hamearis lucina*. Mark Young suggested a 'small Fritillary', and Owen Lewis and Martin Ebejer narrowed it down to *Melitaea*, while Tony Irwin suggested *Melicta varia* or *athalia*.

Most people however, suggested an aberrant form of *Melicta athalia* including; Chris Luckens, Ken Willmott, Tony Pickles, and Art Shapiro. Mike Percival and Willy dePrins went to considerable trouble to point me toward Figures 60 & 67 on Plate 44 in Vol 4 of Verity's famous book, which I reproduce here:

I am extremely grateful to Paola Tozzi and her assistant Raphaela in the Zoology library at the University of Florence for allowing me access to it.



Figures 60 & 67 on the extreme right are labelled by Verity as '*forma cymothoe* (Bert)' but are of two separate specimens from different localities.

Roger Payne referred me to some excellent pictures, also labelled '*ab cymothoe*', Marc Heath (marcheathwildlife photography.zenfolio.com) on www.ukbutterflies.com, which I reproduce here by kind permission, and I am grateful to Peter Eeles for putting us in contact.

Mike Percival and John Tennent both suggested that the specimens I photographed near Arezzo were also *ab cymothoe* and I agree that there is some resemblance although I think that the Arezzo examples are more extreme aberrations, though on the same general theme. I rather agree with Jim Reid that they represent a new and unnamed aberration for which the name *ab stercoratae* might be appropriate, after the little valley where I found them.



In summary, I have no doubt that all those correspondents who suggested that 'my' butterfly was an aberrant *Melicta athalia* were absolutely correct, but it disturbs me slightly that so much of the identification is based on the argument that 'A' looks like a picture of 'B' shown by 'X' who said it was *Melicta athalia ab...*, and that much of the original identification was based on the circumstantial evidence of a few individuals found flying amongst a large population of normal individuals of a readily identifiable species. I rather agree with Karl Bailey who suggested that a more definite identification could be achieved by breeding from the aberrants and seeing what turns up, as it were! Unfortunately such an exercise is quite beyond my competence and inclination!

To be fair Martin Ebejer attempted a little more rigour by pointing out that the chequered fringes, the banded antennae and the cream post-discal band are not features found in *Erebia*, but I would just point out that they are all found in some members of the genus, and I also thought that my photo showed at least some suggestion of the swollen veins at the base of the forewing.

The really rigorous evidence however, was provided by the aforementioned Karl Bailey, who told me that he has consistently produced these aberrants in captive populations of *M. athalia* by temperature stressing the pupa, whether high or low, I am not entirely sure. Unfortunately, he has not so far been able to provide me with pictures of the resulting aberrations. I gather that he has published extensively on this matter and I tried to read one of his papers, but found it a bit impenetrable (sorry Karl – this says more about me than about you!). Nevertheless I bow to his extensive expertise on this matter.

So, the winner is. . . *Melicta athalia celadussa ab cymothoe (stercoratae?)*

John Firth
Cortona, Italy, March 2014

In response to John Firth, *Antenna* 37(4) pp. 198-200

Sir,

My copy of *Antenna* dropped on the mat this morning with some fine photographs of European butterflies taken by J. Firth in central Italy. The final two pictures, which the author thought to be a satyrine, possibly of the genus *Erebia*, or even a new species, depict an extreme aberration of one of the common *Melitaea* butterflies (Nymphalidae), probably *M. athalia*. Nice pictures though!

John Tennent

Sir,

With regard to the images on page 200 of *Antenna* 37(4), I would suggest to John that these may represent a (slightly aberrant) female of *Melitaea varia* Meyer-Dür, 1851. This species is known from the central Apennines in Umbria and may well extend into eastern Tuscany at elevations above 1200m. The underside markings on the forewing are aberrant discally by elongation, but the hind wing looks fairly typical. I have not seen images of females from Italy, but some of this sex from Alpine France and Switzerland are dark above with

