



NOTE

Mass migration of *Coeliades libeon* Druce, 1875 (Lepidoptera: Hesperiidae) in the Albertine Rift, Western Uganda

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INTRODUCTION

This publication is a short response to Pringle's earlier note (Pringle 2016), which also aims to give further information on the life history of *Coeliades libeon* Druce, 1875. Pringle questioned the migratory tendencies of this widespread and occasionally common skipper. He stated that the species might have scattered colonies, can become abundant during population explosions, and that further evidence for migrations by the species is required.

OBSERVATIONS

On 19 March 2014, at approximately 17.30, the author observed an extremely fast-flying, dark lepidopteran specimen from the terrace of Mweya Lodge on the shores of Lake Edward, Queen Elizabeth National Park, Uganda. At first he thought it was a small hawk moth (Sphingidae) as the flight was rapid and in a straight line and the specimen disappeared from sight over the roof of the hotel building. In addition, it is not unusual to see smaller sphingids nectaring before dusk, sometimes in numbers. About a minute later he saw another specimen showing the same behaviour and, after having noticed them, he saw several in the next few minutes, flying from above the lake and heading in the same direction. It became obvious that he was witnessing a migration but he still was not sure about the species, not even the group, since the specimens did not show any signs of stopping and they were flying rather high (3–30 metres above the ground). Occasionally some individuals managed to enter the terrace of the hotel and he had a better chance to look at them, while they tried to find an escape route. The migrating species was identified as *Coeliades libeon* Druce, 1875, and he probably saw thousands between the first specimens observed and the fall of darkness. Interestingly, at dusk he did not observe any changes in behaviour. The butterflies were still actively flying in the same direction. Moreover, later

in the night tens of specimens were attracted by the lamps on the terrace although they did not stay around for long as there seemed to be a complete turnover of individuals. At about midnight he checked the situation again and a few *C. libeon* specimens were still present here and there, sitting on the lamp-lit walls and windows of the hotel. He assumed that the migration had either stopped or had decreased in intensity, mediated by the cool night breeze. The next day he could not see a single individual in the vicinity of the lodge, nor anywhere else in the Queen Elizabeth National Park during the next couple of days.

It was very easy to determine the direction of the migration, since the butterflies were flying directly from the north, where the heights of the Rwenzori Mountains filled the horizon and they were heading southwards following the Albertine Rift. This was the first occasion he had met with the species under purely savannah conditions, where he had not expected them to occur. Clearly they had migrated from their normal breeding habitats. The specimens were probably heading towards the forested areas further south, although he did not observe a single specimen in the next few days in the Maramagambo Forest or in Bwindi National Park. However, he saw quite a few in Kibale Forest, further north, a few days before the migration was witnessed.

One explanation for Pringle's statement concerning high local abundance with no detection of actual migratory movement could be the species' crepuscular and nocturnal activity. If the present author had not had the opportunity to observe the specimens closely and resting at light at night he would never have guessed that they were *C. libeon* flying at dusk and in the dark.

LITERATURE CITED

- PRINGLE, E.L. 2016. *Coeliades libeon* Druce, 1875 (Lepidoptera: Hesperiidae) – A rare migrant? *Metamorphosis* 27: 90–91.

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