

NOTE

***Pentila tropicalis* – new records from the Limpopo lowveld**

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INTRODUCTION

One of the objectives of the South African Butterfly Conservation Assessment project (Mecenero *et al.* 2013) was to 'map the distribution of butterfly species in the atlas region'. Several species records made in the central Lowveld area were unfortunately not captured in the SABCA database. Examples of such records are reported herein, for the species *Pentila tropicalis* (Boisduval, 1847) (Spotted Buff). The range of this species is Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Swaziland (Mecenero *et al.* 2013; Duke *et al.*, 1999). There are four recognized subspecies (Mecenero *et al.* 2013; Williams 2014): *P. t. tropicalis* (Eastern Cape, Kwa-Zulu Natal, Swaziland and Mpumalanga); *P. t. fuscipunctata* Henning & Henning, 1994 (Limpopo, Zimbabwe, Mozambique); *P. t. chyulu* van Someren, 1939 (SE Kenya); and *P. t. mombasae* (Grose-Smith & Kirby, 1889) (Kenya and Tanzania coastal forests). A gap of c. 350km was apparent between the furthest north record of the nominate subspecies at Mbombela near Barberton and the southernmost record of *P. t. fuscipunctata*.

OBSERVATIONS

In 2008 a report of a "buff" sighting along the Klaserie River at farm Fleur de Lys (Fig. 3 – site 3) aroused our interest. Visits to the area never yielded anything so the sighting could not be recorded for SABCA. Even though photographs were apparently taken of the butterfly, these were never seen by the authors. A positive identification was never made but the person who reported the sighting was shown a picture in Woodhall (2005) and he confirmed that it was probably *P. tropicalis*.

During a survey on the farm Glen Lyden (Fig. 3 – site 1) in December 2010, Vaughan Jessnitz, a keen

naturalist who has in the past collected butterfly specimens for researchers and collectors, caught a specimen of *P. tropicalis*. Regrettably this record was not included in Mecenero *et al.* (2013).

Some months later André Coetzer was escorted to the forests of Glen Lyden and collected specimens of *P. tropicalis* for examination and subsequently confirmed that the lowveld subspecies is indeed *P. t. tropicalis* and not *P. t. fuscipunctata*.

During March 2012 *P. t. tropicalis* was again spotted on the farm Eden (Fig. 3 – site 2) which lies to the east of Glen Lyden. In the gardens of the Eden Tea Garden more than five individuals were seen together at one place. This area is c. three km east of the Glen Lyden record and not associated with the southern slope forests of Mariepskop. Later the same month further east at farm Fleur de Lys on the Klaserie River a *P. t. tropicalis* was observed ovipositing on a lichen-covered tree next to the vehicle. Unfortunately no clear photograph could be taken to confirm the identification. The record was however confirmed during April 2012 when photographs were taken of *P. t. tropicalis* (Figs 1 & 2).

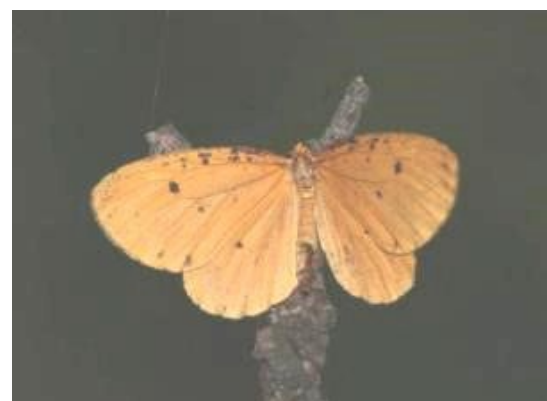


Figure 1 – *Pentila tropicalis*: female recto

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In March 2014 the butterfly was located again along the Blyde River north-west of Mariepskop at Otters Den Lodge (Fig. 3 – site 5). This locality is situated some 24 km north-west of Glen Lyden and is a new ¼° grid square for *P. t. tropicalis*. During April 2014 another population was discovered at the Blyde River Botanical Reserve (Fig. 3 – site 4) which lies adjacent to the Swadini entrance gate. A

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second discovery along the Blyde River system! These discoveries make one wonder whether there is a connection between the *P. t. tropicalis* populations in the south and the *P. t. fuscipunctata* populations north of the Soutpansberg and countries to the north (Henning & Henning 1994).



Figure 2 – *Pentila tropicalis*: female verso A.J. Sharp

CONCLUSIONS

Pentila tropicalis is well established at a number of sites in the Limpopo lowveld. More potential sites need to be explored, such as Legalametse Nature Reserve where *Anthene crawshayi juanita* was discovered and the Woodbush forest near Tzaneen to see how much further we can extend the range of this butterfly. The authors will pursue these possibilities and others during the coming season and will obtain specimens from each site so

that taxonomic experts can resolve the question of which subspecies of *P. tropicalis* inhabits the lowveld of Limpopo and Mpumalanga?

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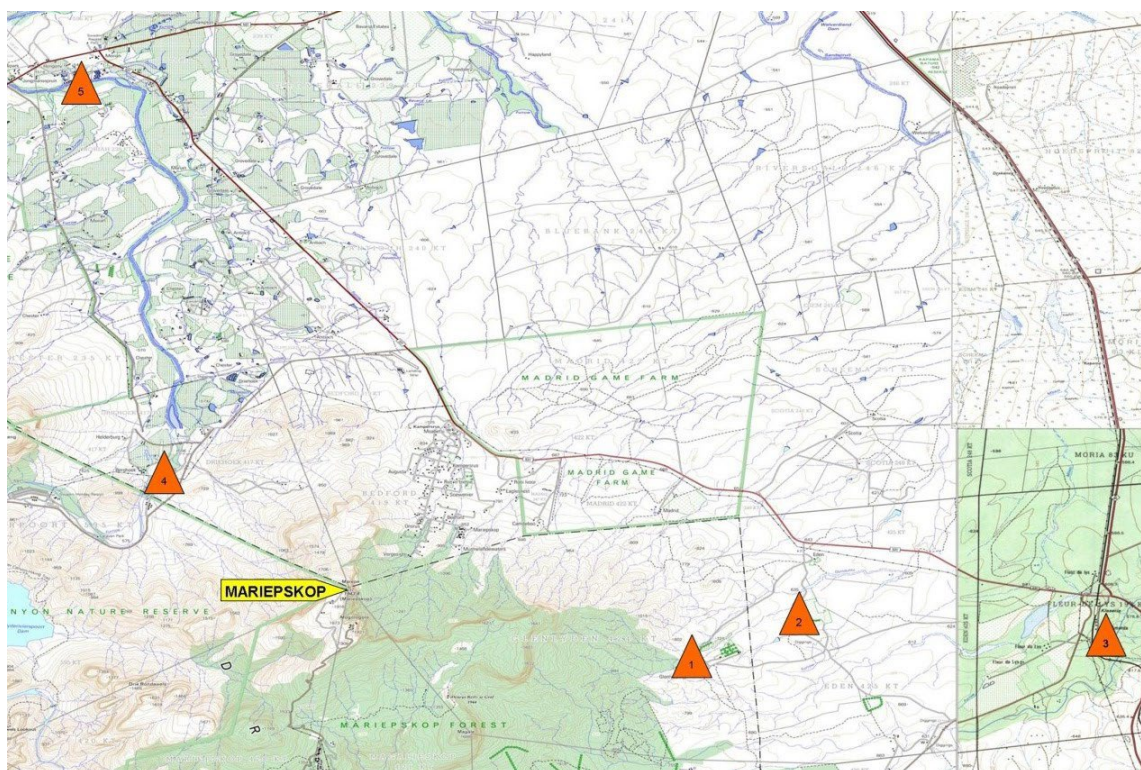


Figure 3 – Localities (sites) recorded for *Pentila tropicalis* in the Limpopo lowveld
1 – Glen Lyden; 2 – Eden; 3 – Fleur de Lys; 4 – Blyde River Botanical Reserve; 5 – Otters Den Lodge