AN ATTEMPT TO REAR *EREBUS ODORA* IN NEW JERSEY

by JOSEPH MULLER

Nobody likes to admit a failure, but being convinced that negative results may be of value to other lepidopterists I am communicating to members of the Lepidopterists' Society my experiences in rearing *Erebus odora* (Linné) in the hope that they will profit thereby. When I caught this female *Erebus odora* I had hoped that the title of this note would be "The Successful Rearing of *Erebus odora* in New Jersey," but that dream did not come true.

Nevertheless, having been urged by a brother lepidopterist to prepare these notes, I now hope that they will reach the eyes of someone who has had experience in rearing this insect and will be able to point out my mistakes, especially in the selection of the proper food plants. If luck is with me, I will perhaps catch another female next season.

Last summer on August 11th, for the third time in recent years, I took a female *Erebus odora.* It was a battered specimen, the primaries as well as the secondaries being almost half gone, but to make up for its condition it was extremely lively. The moth was put in a paper bag with a small piece of cotton soaked in sugar water. Each two days the cotton was resoaked. At the expiration of the first two-day period almost two hundred surprisingly small eggs were laid. The moth was then transferred to a second bag and the eggs cut from the first bag and placed in a jar. On August 18th, to my surprise, all eggs hatched. The larvæ were rather large considering the smallness of the eggs, and very lively, acting somewhat like geometrid larvæ.

With the appearance of the larvæ I thought my troubles were over, but soon found to my disappointment that they were only beginning. To select the proper food I first consulted "The Lepidoptera of Pennsylvania" by HARRISON M. TIETZ (1952), which had proven valuable before in similar circumstances. There the following food plants were mentioned: *Acacia decurrens, Cassia fistula, Ficus trigonata, Gymnocladus diocus, Pithecollobium unguiscate,* and *Saman* sp. In "The Lepidoptera of New York and Neighboring States" by W. T. M. FORBES (1920), Acacia alone was given as the food plant. Not quite satisfied with this list because of the scarcity of those plants in New Jersey, I inquired from three fellow collectors for suggestions. These proposed Papaw, Acacia, Virginia Creeper, Privet, and Urticaceæ (Elm, Hackberry, Hop, Nettle, and Fig). With this information I prepared four jars, one containing Elm and Hackberry, the second Virginia Creeper and Privet, the third Black Locust and Honey Locust, and the fourth Tulip Tree leaves and Hickory. The two hundred larvæ were divided equally in the four containers. The first day they did much moving around, as if searching for something, the second day their pace was slower and on the third day they merely rested on the sides of the container, becoming smaller, shriveling up and dying for lack of the proper food. All this time the larvæ were watched carefully for signs that something was being eaten, but only one

appeared to have fed a little on the surface of the leaf of the Virginia Creeper. Two hundred larvæ — and healthy ones — were dead.

Opening the second paper bag I found to my surprise three hundred fifteen more eggs. This fact appeared to give me another chance. Removing the female to a third bag, again four containers were prepared. When the larvæ were hatched in a few days they were placed in them and the following plants added: Mulberry, Sumac, Honeysuckle, Wild Cherry, Oak, Catalpa, Osage Orange, and some leaves from unknown garden bushes. But the results were exactly similar to the first lot. After two days I got in touch with a botanist who helped me find two species of *Cassia* and some Kentucky Coffee Trees. One larva only ate the surface of a Coffee Tree leaf, but again they all perished.

Then my obliging female laid one hundred thirty more eggs, giving me still a third chance — like a new lease on life. These larvæ were put on Coffee Tree, *Cassia,* and Fig, three food plants upon which *Erebus odora* is supposed to feed, but again the results were negative and after three days all the larvæ were dead.

This female lived in captivity for nineteen days laying six hundred forty-five eggs from which emerged healthy, lively larvæ. Can anyone tell me why I failed to rear them? What is the food plant for *Erebus odora* in New Jersey? I am much puzzled.

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VANESSA ATALANTA TAKEN AT ATLANTIC CITY AT 2 A.M.

REMINGTON (1948) noted that more information was needed on the habits of Lepidoptera, including the location of night resting for diurnal species. Mrs. MATHER and I observed that *Vanessa atalanta* was rather common at Atlantic City, Atlantic Co., New Jersey, during the period 16 through 21 June 1957. We were surprised however to find two individuals resting on the boardwalk within about 50 feet of each other at about 2:00 A.M. on the morning of 21 June. They were easily approached and taken by hand.

Reference

Remington, Charles L., 1948. Lepidoptera biology — open for study. *Lepid. News* 2: 37.

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