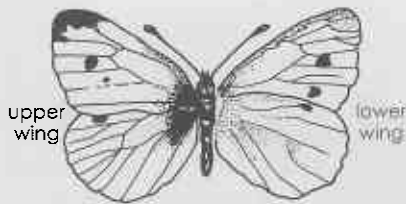


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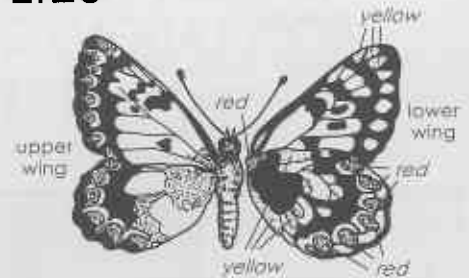
THE WHITE BUTTERFLIES



Cabbage White
Colour - cream with black patches.



Generalised White pupa



Wood White
Upper - cream and black
Lower - cream and black with some red and yellow infill.

HAVE Cabbage White butterflies increased in numbers since canola started to be widely planted? Anne Rick, *LFWO* at Newdegate asked this question after she noticed a large number of them taking nectar from a *Scaevola spinescens*. The answer is, no-one knows. The caterpillars will attack canola, but only in its younger stages, and crop spraying would control most of them. But the canola now increasingly prevalent on road verges is a possible weedy host ...

The Cabbage White (*Pieris rapae*) is native to Europe and the Mediterranean. The butterfly is nomadic, and a good flier, but its spread has undoubtedly been helped by humans carting vegies around. It first appeared in North America in 1860 and had spread across the continent by 1883. From there it reached Hawaii in 1898, and New Zealand by 1930. In Australia it was first observed in Victoria in 1939 (presumably having come from NZ), and by 1943 had reached Perth - this despite a ban on

importing brassicas from the eastern States.

The pale yellow eggs are laid singly on the underside of the leaves of a food plant, preferably cultivated brassicas - cabbage, cauliflower, sprouts and broccoli - but they will eat almost any member of the cabbage family (*Cruciferae*) including the weedy radish and turnip. It is unlikely that they could have spread across Australia so quickly if the introduced weeds hadn't already preceded them. The velvety-green caterpillar is difficult to see, but the results of its voracious eating are not - a few can easily totally demolish a backyard cabbage patch. The caterpillar eats, grows and moults five times before leaving the host to seek a vertical structure such as a fence or tree, where it will pupate. Adults appear in spring.

Although they prefer crucifers, the caterpillars will live on some plants from other families, notably nasturtiums and mignonette. Australian crucifers are small and inconspicuous, without much leaf

area, so are unlikely to be utilised by this butterfly, however, as Anne's observation demonstrates, the adults are clearly using native plants to fuel up as they search for new host plants.

The Wood White (*Delias aganippe*) is WA's only native close relative White butterfly. It's a beautiful animal, slightly larger than the Cabbage White, with its wings intricately patterned in black and white with red and yellow patches added to the underside. The caterpillars are dark brown with white spots and are somewhat hairy. They feed on mistletoes, or occasionally Sandalwood or Quandong. Pupae can be found on the twigs or branches of the food plant. It is possible that the adults can no longer locate mistletoes on isolated paddock trees or in roadside groups, and so the loss of this particular herbivore could be another reason why mistletoe infestations seem to be on the increase.

Penny Hussey