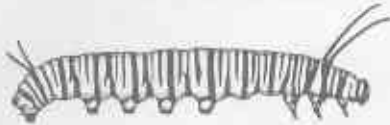
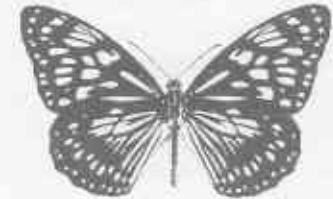


MEMBERS PAGE



A CLOUD OF WANDERERS



Lyn White of Darkan wrote: "When I was returning from Hamelin Bay with a friend in January, we came across a cloud of beautiful wanderer butterflies near the Roelands area. They were coming towards us, so were obviously heading for the coast. Perhaps 'cloud' is an exaggeration, but there were certainly hundreds of them. Once they'd passed us, we saw just the odd dead one on the road.

"I thought of the Bogong moths, and presume that the wanderer migration is also a natural annual occurrence. But as they are not native here, so I have read, are they perhaps attempting to return to the land of their origin?"

Robert Powell of the Insect Study Society says that the wanderer or monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) is a large and very conspicuous butterfly; black lines on its wings enclose panels of orange with white dots around the edges and on the



body. They are strong fliers and are capable of traversing continents and even oceans. In North America, their original home, they migrate south for the winter, forming huge swarms that can literally cover the trees in favoured resting places. In eastern Australia they migrate from mountainous areas to the coast for winter, but not much is known about their migration patterns in WA.

The wanderer was first recorded in WA in 1897 at Glen Forrest, but only

became common in the 1960s with the spread of its favoured food plant swan plant or cottonbush (*Gomphocarpus fruticosus*) whose light fluffy seeds have spread it widely along creeks and around wetlands in the Darling Range and Swan Coastal Plain. The plant is quite toxic and the brightly black, white and orange striped caterpillars advertise to potential bird predators that they, too, are distasteful and probably poisonous. Cottonbush is a Declared Plant in WA because of its toxicity to stock, so if a serious control campaign were ever undertaken, the 'clouds' of wanderers would also decrease.

For more information: read Bring Back the Butterflies: butterfly gardening for Western Australians. 1994. RW Hay, TF Houston, AAE Williams & MR Williams. WA Insect Study Society. or check the Australian Museum fact sheet: <http://amonline.net.au/factsheets/monarch.htm>