

Life history notes on the Orange-streaked Ringlet, *Hypocysta irius* (Fabricius, 1775)
Lepidoptera: Nymphalidae - Wesley Jenkinson

The Orange-streaked Ringlet also previously known as the Northern Ringlet is encountered along much of the eastern coastal districts from north-eastern Queensland southward into northern New South Wales. The species is generally common north of Brisbane becoming less common south of Brisbane.

This species appears to be more restricted to wetter areas than the Orange Ringlet (*H. adiante*), Rock Ringlet (*H. euphemia*) and Grey Ringlet (*H. pseudirius*). The preferred habitats are tropical, subtropical rainforest margins, along creeks and moister gullies in dry rainforest, dry vine scrub and eucalypt open-forest.

The adults are localised, flying in dappled sunlight within forested areas usually within a couple of meters from ground level. They have the typical ringlet ‘bobby’ flight and while basking their wings are periodically opened and closed quickly, revealing the upper-side colours. Once disturbed they can fly quite rapidly and can be difficult to follow through understorey vegetation. The males are quite territorial and do not appear to hilltop as with other species in this genus. Both sexes feed from a variety of small native and introduced flowers.

Whilst in flight, the adults can be very easily confused with the Brown Ringlet (*H. metirius*), particularly older worn specimens. In comparison to *H. metirius* and *H. pseudirius*, the adults have an orange suffusion across the upperside of the forewings. The eyespots on the underside of the hind wings are also consistently larger than in those two species. The sexes are quite similar in appearance. In comparison to the males, females have the upperside forewing central orange patch brighter and often more extensive and the forewing is slightly broader with the termen (outer/lower margin) more rounded (Braby, 2000). The average wingspan for the males is 33mm and 35mm for the females.

On a recent trip during April 2012 to the Perry River west of Bundaberg, a female was collected and kept in captivity. She laid two eggs and was then released. These eggs



Hypocysta irius (Orange-streaked Ringlet)
 Images left to right: male, female, male underside, female underside

were kept for life history studies. Subsequently the larvae were successfully raised on the native grass Green Couch (*Cynodon dactylon*) with both of the adults emerging as large sized females. It appears that the usual native host grasses for this species so far are not recorded.



The eggs were smooth and translucent cream coloured, slightly off spherical, approximately 0.8mm high x 0.8mm wide.

Freshly laid egg of *H. irius*



1st instar larva



2nd instar larva



3rd instar larva



4th instar brown larva



4th instar green larva



The first instars emerged by 8.00am and consumed their eggshells shortly afterwards. The two larvae were observed feeding solitarily during daylight hours and resting on either side of the leaves of the utilised host plant. Typically like other species in the genus, they were very slow moving and fed from the outer edge of the leaf. Both of the larvae raised completed four instars (similar to *H. metirius*, *H. pseudirius*, *H. adiante* and *H. euphemia*). Graham Wood in 1988 also recorded four instars for this species, (Braby 2000). Unfortunately the final instar larval size was not measured but was thought to be approximately 23mm long. The final instars

produced two colour forms as pictured above.



Pupa lateral, dorsal and ventral view

The pupae were attached by silk to grass stems, hanging by the cremaster with the head suspended down. They were light grey in colour with a length of 14mm.

The total time from egg to adult was about two months, with egg duration of 5 days, larval duration 36 days and pupal duration of 19 days.

Within the boundary of the new Scenic Rim Regional Shire south of Brisbane I have adult records for the months from September to December, February and May. These records probably indicate there are two generations annually in this region. Although Atkins (this issue) reports this species declining on the Sunshine Coast, John Moss and myself found it was quite common along the Gunalda Range between Gympie and Maryborough.

Photos Wesley Jenkinson

Reference:

Braby, M.F., 2000. Butterflies of Australia – Their Identification, Biology and Distribution. vol 2. CSIRO Publishing.

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