

Spotlight on Species

Mormon Metalmark Butterfly

Recovery and protection of this butterfly will contribute to biodiversity, health and functioning of the environment and enhance opportunities for appreciation of special places and species

A unique butterfly

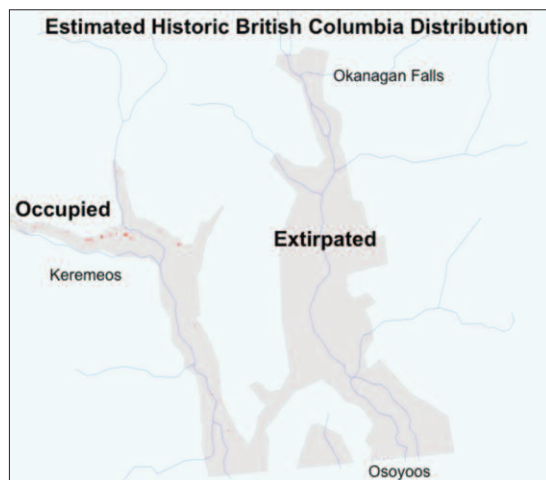
This is the only member of the metalmark family that has established a population in Canada. There are more than 1200 species of metalmark butterflies in tropical America.

This rare and endangered butterfly is found in only two places in Canada. One of them, the Southern Mountain population, is in the lower Similkameen Valley and the other is in southern Saskatchewan. Historically, the Mormon Metalmark was also found in the South Okanagan (Oliver and Vaseux Lake) however that population has been extirpated.

The recovery goal for this butterfly is to "maintain a viable population in secure habitat within the species historic range in the South Okanagan and Lower Similkameen valleys of British Columbia."



Photo by Orville Dyer



Origins of its name

The common name, Metalmark, relates to the presence of metallic-coloured markings on the wings in many species in the family. However, the Mormon Metalmark lacks these metallic markings.

International Pollinator Week June 22th-28th

Pollinators are an integral part of our environment and are critically important in 35 percent of global crop production. In Canada, there are 800 species of bees of which the bumble bee (Native to North America) is the best known and considered the most important pollinator. The role of native pollinators to the future success of agriculture is crucial as the number of honey bee colonies are in decline due to Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) and other problems.

In the South Okanagan-Similkameen area, Ted Leischner is working to reverse the bee pollinator decline in our region, which impacts future food security and ecosystem health. For more information contact Ted Leischner at 250-499-9471 or email bcted1@yahoo.ca

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Characteristics:

A medium-sized butterfly, with a 25 to 35 mm wingspan. The dorsal (the top of the wing) wing surface has a dark brown background with reddish-brown patches and white spots. The eyes are green and antennae have conspicuous black-and-white bands. The female is larger than the male, and has three pairs of functioning legs, while the male's forelegs are not used for walking. Eggs are flattened pink spheres that turn purple, and are laid in groups of two to four on the host plant. Larvae are dark violet, with six rows of clustered spines, black on top and red-brown at the side. The pupa is somewhat hairy, mottled brown in colour and is found in the plant litter at the base of the host plant.

Habitat:

Hillsides, eroding slopes and embankments with sandy or gravelly soils that have high densities of rabbitbrush and snow buckwheat. Larvae require snow buckwheat for feeding and may require snow buckwheat stems or leaf litter for hibernating. Adults require mature snow buckwheat for egg laying, and flowering snow buckwheat and rabbitbrush for nectaring.

Threats:

1. Human alteration of the landscape poses a significant threat to the Mormon Metalmark in British Columbia. Construction and maintenance activities along transportation and utility corridors, the same areas occupied by this butterfly, can destroy its colonies. At the same time, paradoxically, this butterfly depends upon the growth of the Snow Buckwheat host plant, which thrives in these disturbed areas. Much of the habitat for the Mormon Metalmark in British Columbia has been altered by human activities.

2. Non-native weeds, such as Diffuse Knapweed, Dalmation Toadflax, and Downy Brome may out-compete Snow Buckwheat, and reduce habitat quality for the Mormon Metalmark.

3. Additional threats may include development on private lands and agricultural practices such as pesticide use and animal grazing.

Rabbit Brush



Photo by Sara Bunge

Snow Buckwheat



Photo by Sara Bunge

Latin name:

Apodemia mormo

Conservation status:

Federally listed as Endangered. RED Listed in BC (endangered or threatened).

What you can do to help the Mormon Metalmark Butterfly:

- ✓ Protect and/or restore habitat where known instances of Mormon Metalmark butterfly occur
- ✓ Contact a local conservation group and find out about protecting this and other endangered species www.soscp.org
- ✓ Avoid irrigating dry slopes with snow buckwheat and rabbitbrush
- ✓ Learn more about insects and their beneficial role in healthy ecosystems



Photo by Orville Dyer

Side view of the Mormon Metalmark Butterfly