



THE BUCKEYE BUTTERFLY - page 3

THE BUCKEYES

(*Precis coenia*)

by Eve Hannahs

Buckeyes are classified as brush-footed butterflies. This large, diverse group has a common characteristic—the first pair of legs is greatly reduced, resulting in their appearing to have only two pairs of legs instead of the usual three sets. The group is also known as the “thistle butterflies” because of their preference for thistles for nectaring.

The dark, olive-gray buckeye larvae with yellow or orange spots and stripes have short branching spines. They feed on plaintain, *Plantago*; *Gerardia* spp.; and the primrose willow, *Ludwigia* spp. There may be several broods a year in Florida.

Buckeyes are largely confined to the tropical regions of the world. Only two occur in North America. Those species that like a cool, moist environment are larger and darker with larger eyespots than those from warmer, drier places. Individuals of the drier environment may be active and migratory, while those of the moist areas may be less active and non-migratory. This butterfly presents many unanswered questions. Klotz suggests the buckeyes need careful study and analytical work.

Buckeyes are distinctive in having eyespots on their wings. The common buckeye has a large spot on the upper forewing, and an even larger spot on the upper surface of the hind wing with a tiny spot underneath. The wingspread is two to two-and-one-half inches.

The larger, tropical buckeye, *Precis lavinea zonalis*, of Florida and Texas, also has three eyespots, the upper spot of the hind wing being much smaller than on the other butterfly. It has been suggested that eyespots are a form of protection, since a predator attacking the spots will tear only the wing, leaving the vital parts unharmed.

Buckeyes, upon close observation, may be seen in fall migration, along with monarchs, cloudless sulphurs, painted ladies, zebra long-wings, and other south-bound individuals. They are often found nectaring on *Garberia fruticosa*.