

Butterflies and Native Plants

Malachite, Atala, White Peacock

by Eve Hannahs

Because of geographic location and proximity to the Atlantic Ocean and especially the warm Gulf of Mexico, Florida has unique plant communities and insect populations. Some lepidoptera of Florida are found rarely or never in other states of the continental United States, with the exception of southernmost Texas.

The tropical butterfly, Malachite, *Siproeta stelenis*, is one of these—a large, 2½ to 3 inch tailed butterfly of unusual beauty. Above, it is black with marbled green; underneath the marbled green it is marked with white and light brown. As the insect ages, the green soon fades to almost white.

It has been suggested that these butterflies are strays, but there is evidence that they breed in Hidden Woods Park, in the Ft. Lauderdale area. The distinct caterpillar, to 2" in

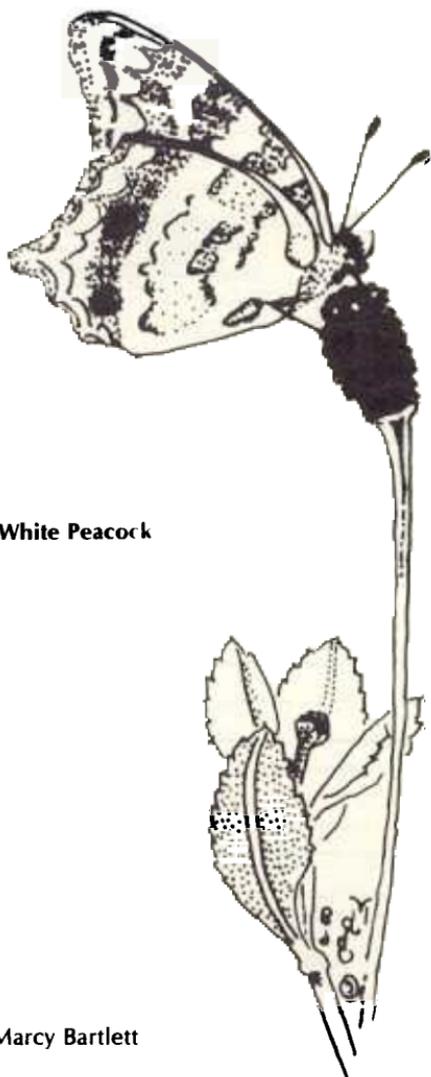
length; is velvety black with red bristles and recurved horns. It feeds on *Blechnum brownei* and other related species. Blechnum is common to most of Florida.

The once common Atala, *Eumaeus atala*, of southernmost Florida was thought at one time to be extinct in the U.S. because of destruction or alteration of habitat. The small, 1½" butterfly is velvety black above with a blue iridescent sheen. Below, it is black with three rows of metallic blue dots on the hind wing. The coral-red abdomen has a matching spot on the hind wing.

The showy dark red caterpillars have two rows of yellow spots. Their host plants are members of the Cycadaceae. They are reported to be partial to zamias, especially *Z. integrifolia*, but are also reported to be found on rare cycads in Fairchild Gardens! Their range is extreme south Florida and the Bahamas.

The white peacock, *Anartia jatrophae*, one of the brush footed butterflies, is related to the Buckeye. Klots states that in the tropics it forms many sub-species and local forms. The handsome 2 to 2½" butterfly has rounded wing tips and a stubby tail. Above coloring has silver-white ground with white outlines on both sets of wings; bordering colors are orange and brown. Above and underneath surfaces have intricate patterns of orange and brown. The hind wing has two eye spots underneath.

This butterfly is reported to be widespread in the tropics, and can be found in Florida and the southern regions of Texas. They have been sighted as far north as Kansas and Massachusetts, but the sighting is a rarity. Although white peacocks are considered common in Florida, they seem to be restricted to disturbed fresh water shorelines. During early November of 1985, large colonies were observed on the shores of a pond in Lake Woodruff Wildlife Preserve west of DeLand. They were feeding on water hyssop, *Bacopa*, and creeping charlie or capeweed, *Lippia nodiflora*. No caterpillars were observed.



White Peacock