

Migration of Blue-spotted Arabs *Colitis phisadia* and associated insects at Sila'a, Western Abu Dhabi in November 2008

by Oscar Campbell

Further to the note in *Tribulus* by Gardner and Howarth (2007), a comparable migration of butterflies and certain other insects was noted at Sila'a, Western Abu Dhabi on 7th November 2008. Whilst bird-watching in two small, sheltered plantations that lie approximately 3km north of the town of Sila'a, I encountered very large numbers of Blue-spotted Arabs (*Colitis phisadia*), mostly sheltering and basking on any and every piece of vegetation available close to the ground. Given the large numbers of individuals, their ceaseless movement and two-dimensional distribution, counting them did not prove practical but they probably numbered many thousands since it seemed that every shrub, however small, was covered in them. There was no marked directional flight observed and many of the butterflies were clearly using the plantations for rest, presumably having recently arrived.

Clearly associated with this movement were many tens of Lime Butterflies *Papilio demoleus* (like Blue-spotted Arab, classified as a 'moderate migrant' by Larsen 1984), and hundreds of the dragonflies *Anax ephippiger* and, especially, *Pantala flavescens*. Both of these Odonata species are well-known as strongly migratory opportunists (Dijkstra, 2006).

A return visit to the area one month later (9th – 10th December) produced negligible numbers of Blue-spotted Arabs and both dragonfly species, whilst no Lime Butterflies were recorded.

Regular observations throughout the autumn on Abu Dhabi Island revealed small numbers of migrant *Pantala flavescens* on many dates in October and November, but no evidence for inflated numbers of any of the other species noted at Sila'a, nor the presence of Caper White *Anaphaeis aurota* or the Crimson Speckled moth *Utetheisa pulchella*, two species sometimes temporarily abundant in the area.

On the original date at a nearby freshwater pool and small marsh bordering a date palm plantation, I observed both dragonfly species again, albeit in smaller numbers, and also present were small numbers (less than 10 each) of *Crocothemis erythraea*, *Diplacodes lefebvrei* and *Orthetrum sabina*, all holding territory on small pools. None of the latter three species appeared to be behaving as transients. However, on a return visit on 9th – 10th December, none were in evidence despite several hours being spent in the general area.

References

- Dijkstra, K-D B (2006) *Field Guide to the dragonflies of Britain and Europe* British Wildlife Publishing, Dorset
Gardner, D & Howarth, B (2007) A Butterfly Migration: *Blue-spotted Arabs at Jebel Barakah, western Abu Dhabi. Tribulus 17: 98*
Larsen, T (1984) *Butterflies of Saudi Arabia and its neighbours*. Stacey International, London

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Blue-spotted Arab



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Crocothemis erythraea



Diplacodes lefebvrei