

FAMILY: Heliconiidae

(sometimes considered a subfamily of Nymphalidae)

DESCRIPTION:

Wide geographical variation with polytypical species due to different mimetic environments. Some species imitate butterflies in other families such as Nymphalinae/Nymphalidae, Arctiidae, or Ithomiinae, and always have bright, colors that warn predators of their toxicity. Relatively large head and eyes, and with unusually narrow, elongated forewings.

DIVERSITY:

Worldwide: 60 species, 12 genera
Neotropical: 60 species, 12 genera
Caribbean: 6 species
Hispaniola: 4 species

RANGE:

Restricted to Neotropics

ECOLOGY:

Diurnal. All are distasteful to predators, possibly due to substances sequestered from larval plant hosts. Many are long-lived and reproduce continuously. Females carefully examine plants before egg-laying to avoid predators or other Heliconius eggs or larvae. Cannibalism has been observed among larvae. Larvae are cylindrical, and are cryptically colored and either armed with long spines or are brightly colored to mimic other species. Larvae have a one-to-one relationship with the host and feed solely on Passiflora (passion vines). Adults feed on Cucurbitaceae (Gurania). Mullerian mimicry (where different toxic species mimic each other) observed with some species.

COLLECTION METHODS:

Aerial net

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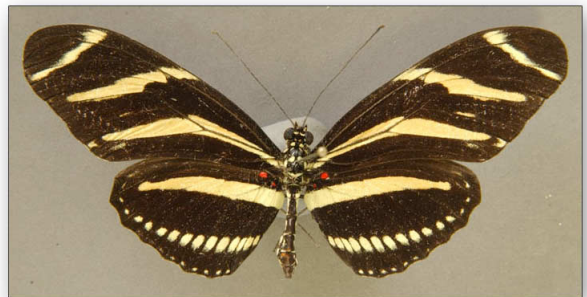
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Dryas iulia

Range: Southern Florida, Texas to Bolivia and Brazil, the Bahamas, Greater and Lesser Antilles.

Widespread in Neotropics. 37-39mm wingspan. Does not migrate. Generally found in margins of woodland or in open areas.



Heliconius charitonius

Range: Southeastern North America to Texas, through Central America and South America to Ecuador, the Bahamas, Greater and Lesser Antilles

Wide range of habitats. 40-46 mm wingspan. Slow and deliberate flier.