

Sternitzky! Our mountain butterfly

BY LINDA KAPPEN

If we hike a bit farther than where we found the Clodius Parnassian discussed in the winter *Applegater*, we reach our higher elevation mountains where our other Parnassian butterfly lives in subalpine rocky tops and meadows.

The Mountain Parnassian (*Parnassius smintheus ssp.*) *sternitzkyi* of the great family of Papilionidae is our own endemic subspecies in the Klamath-Siskiyou Mountains of southern Oregon. This subspecies was named after the late Robert F. Sternitzsky, who was a lepidopterist and illustrator.

These Parnassian fly later in spring through late summer. Locally we have seen them in early to mid-June or when roadway snow is melting. Their size can reach 2.5 inches. They are white with less transparency than the Clodius Parnassian.

The Sternitzsky's Parnassians are adorned with two kinds of spots: black-outlined red spots with pinkish centers and large ink-black spots softened by edges of light gray. The antennae are alternately ringed in black and white.

The males fly before the females come out, giving the males time to search for food and for the freshly eclosed (just emerged from pupae) females. The sphragis is a small light-brown covering, forming a kind of chastity belt. Females lay single eggs in the habitat of their host plant, sedum, our native stonecrop. Caterpillars feed mainly on the leaves, and hibernation occurs at the egg stage. Adults nectar on flowers of stonecrop or the aster family. They fly in rocky and steep habitats where the host plant grows and stop briefly in the meadows nearby.

Sternitzsky's Parnassian can be found locally only in higher-elevation, rocky, subalpine areas of the Klamath-Siskiyou mountains of southern Oregon and northern California and as far east as the Soda Mountain area. We are so sure of their appearance in steep, rocky habitats that one time during a Siskiyou Field Institute butterfly course,

Dana Ross, MS, entomologist, the instructor, led our small caravan to a safe stop on a mountain road. There he invited the more strenuous hikers to join him on a climb through large boulders with shadowed crevices to search for the Sternitzsky.

It sure looked fun and adventurous, especially to about half the class who didn't hesitate at the opportunity! As the co-instructor and host for the class, I stayed on the road with several folks, where we made our own observations. Pretty soon everyone appeared out of the rocks. Dana had two perfect specimens, a male and a female, which we cooled down for a few minutes, then set on the rocks to observe and talk about. Everyone marveled at them, and the cameras were clicking to give us another moment in time. It was a real mountain moment to be so close to such a primitive species.



A male Sternitzsky's Parnassian.



A female Sternitzsky's Parnassian on Ranger's Buttons.

A Sternitzsky's Parnassian caterpillar (not a common sight).



Look for a butterfly course in the future with Dana Ross and Siskiyou Field Institute.

Linda Kappen
humbugkapps@hotmail.com
All photos by Linda Kappen.

ACE
FIELDS
HOME CENTER
5285 WILLIAMS HWY
541.862.2111

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The advertisement features a large outdoor patio area with a wooden deck. In the foreground, there is a set of four grey outdoor chairs around a square table. To the left, a large black grill stands on a pedestal. In the background, two hanging flower baskets with red and purple flowers are suspended from the ceiling. The patio overlooks a lush green lawn and trees. In the bottom left corner, there are several bags of garden supplies, including 'Happy Frog' potting soil and 'Nature Scapes' mulch. In the bottom right corner, there is a bag of 'Hickory' wood chips and a blue YETI cooler.