

# BUTTERFLIES OF SOCOTRA

## LEPIDOPTERA

Butterflies are a group of colourful insects within the order of LEPIDOPTERA. The name LEPIDOPTERA is derived from the two Greek words for scales and wings. The other large group within the LEPIDOPTERA are the moths.

## Butterflies and Moths

Although there is no real taxonomic difference between butterflies and moths there are some differences:

- Butterflies are generally brightly coloured while most moths are less striking;
- Butterflies fly during the day while most moths fly at night;
- The tips of the antennae have a club in butterflies, in moths the antennae are thin or feathery;
- Most butterflies hold their wings together vertically above the abdomen, moths usually hold their wings flat against the surface or rooflike.

Three different Blues (Lycaenidae) of Socotra. Left the very small *Chilades trochylus*, in the middle the beautifully marked *Tarucus quadratus* that is quite common on the island. On the right the endemic *Leptotes socotranus*. This species can only be found in the mountains.



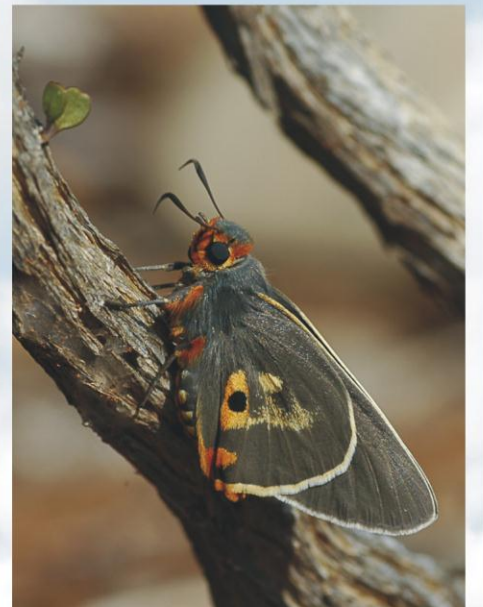
## Habitats

Butterflies can be found in a large variety of habitats. On Socotra they can be found from the coast to the top the mountains. Some species can be found everywhere like the very small Blue *Zizeeria knysna*. They are evenly common near coastal areas as high in the mountains. This is clearly not the case in all species. Some species like the spectacular *Papilio demodocus* and the two species of *Charaxes* are largely confined to mountainous areas.

In most areas on the island you can find around five species of Butterflies. Only in the higher part of the mountains more than fifteen species can be found.



*Acrea neobule* (left) can be easily identified by the transparent wingtips. The large and spectacular *Charaxes candiope* is one of two species of this genus that occur on the island.



The male *Hippolimnas bolina* (left) looks totally different from the female which is brown with a light band at the edge of the wings. *Coeliades anchises* is a large species within the Skippers (Hesperiidae) and is common throughout the island.

## Species on Socotra

There are 25 species of Butterflies known on Socotra of which three are endemic. Within the Butterflies the degree of endemism on Socotra is surprisingly low, compared to other groups like Grasshoppers & Crickets and Reptiles.



## Threats

The only places where larger numbers of Butterflies can be found are in the mountains. These places are generally well vegetated and the pressure of grazing goats is lower. The lower parts of the island are drier and heavily grazed by goats and the number of species that can be found here is much lower. The caterpillar of the once common *Bicyclus anynana* (left) feeds on grasses that are also the favorite food of goats. Nowadays the species seems to be confined to the higher, densely vegetated parts of the mountains.