

Pest Alert

FDACS-P-01271

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Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Division of Plant Industry

Prepona laertes (Lepidoptera: Nymphalidae), an exotic butterfly

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INTRODUCTION: *Prepona laertes* (Hübner) is a butterfly native to tropical South and Central America. In August 2013, USDA and FDACS-DPI detected a population of adults and larvae feeding on *Chrysobalanus icaco* L., cocoplum, in Broward County, Fla. (Hayden 2013). The infestation has persisted to the present in a localized area in Coconut Creek.

IDENTIFICATION: The butterflies are dorsally blue and ventrally brown (Figs. 1, 2). Females (not shown) are larger and lack the males' yellow hind wing tufts. The eggs are laid singly on leaves in the shade and hatch in a week (Fig. 3). Older larvae (Fig. 4) have a cone-shaped head and a pair of tails, which are less pronounced in young larvae. The chrysalis (Fig. 5) is green, has two short horns and is suspended in foliage.

HOSTS: Larvae feed on foliage of trees mainly in Chrysobalanaceae and Fabaceae. In its native range, hosts include cocoplum and relatives; *Andira inermis* (W. Wright) Kunth ex DC., cabbagebark tree or angelin; *Inga* species; *Melicoccus bijugatus* Jacq., Spanish lime or genip (Beccaloni et al. 2008). Larvae chew the distal half of a leaf, leaving the midrib as a resting perch. Caterpillars of some other butterfly species cause similar damage to other trees, but only *P. laertes* feeds on cocoplum in this way. The few moth larvae that feed on cocoplum do not have conical heads. Beetles, such as the *Mylocerus undecimpustulatus undatus* (Marshall), Sri Lankan weevil, chew irregular holes in cocoplum leaves without constructing a perch.

ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE: In Florida, larvae have been observed feeding on wild cocoplum. The plant is a common hedgerow in South Florida, so the butterfly could become widely distributed.

DETECTION: Examination of specimens is necessary to confirm identification. Larvae are the life stage that is most likely to be found. To collect a specimen, place larvae in a vial of 70% isopropyl or ethyl alcohol with the damaged leaf. Net adult butterflies, immobilize by squeezing the body and place them in an envelope with packing to avoid crushing in transit. Submit specimens with [collection data](#) to FDACS-DPI Entomology, 1911 SW 34th St., Gainesville, FL 32608-1201.

REFERENCES:

Beccaloni, G.W., A.L. Vilorio, S.K. Hall, and G.S. Robinson. 2008. Catalogue of the hostplants of the Neotropical Butterflies. S.E.A. / RIBES / CYTED / The Natural History Museum / Instituto Venezolano de Investigaciones Científicas. 536 p.

Hayden, J.E. 2013. Entomology Section. P.J. Anderson and Wayne Dixon (Editors). *Prepona laertes*, a nymphalid butterfly, a new continental USA record. Tri-ology 52(4): 1, 5, 6, 10.



Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Adam H. Putnam, Commissioner



Fig. 1. Male *Prepona laertes*, dorsal aspect. Scale bar = 1 cm.
Photo credit: J.E. Hayden, DPI



Fig. 2. Male *Prepona laertes*, ventral aspect. Scale bar = 1 cm.
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Fig. 3. Egg of *Prepona laertes*. Scale in mm.
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Fig. 4. Third-stage of *Prepona laertes* larva on cocoplum leaf perch.
Photo credit: J.E. Hayden, DPI

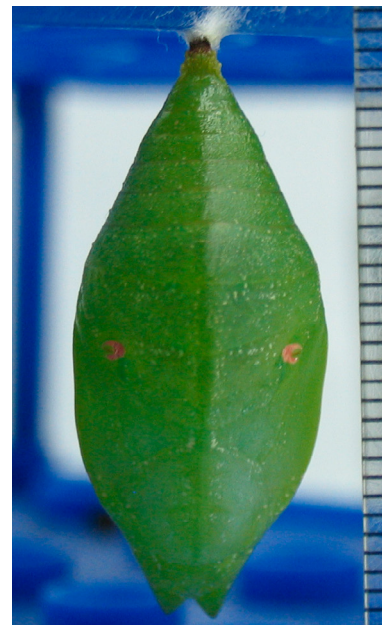


Fig. 5. *Prepona laertes* pupa. Scale in mm.
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