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NOTE

# A new and unusual larval host plant for the Blue Pansy *Junonia orithya* (Lepidoptera: Nymphalidae: Nymphalinae) in Dubai, United Arab Emirates – the ornamental petunia (Solanaceae: Petunioideae: *Petunia*)

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## OBSERVATIONS

In mid-December 2017, in Dubai's Mushrif Park, a long-established property with a mix of natural and landscaped environments, BR noticed a single, spiky black caterpillar of what appeared to be *Junonia orithya* among the leaves of a thick bed of cultivated petunias, apparently the common garden hybrid *Petunia* x *atkinsiana* (Solanaceae), also known as *P.* x *hybrida* (Kwei & Esmonde, 1977; Wikipedia) (Fig. 1).

**Figure 1** – The ornamental petunia at Mushrif Park, apparently the common garden hybrid *Petunia* x *atkinsiana* (also known as *P.* x *hybrida*), on which a spiky black caterpillar of *Junonia orithya* was found.

Modern Dubai's many horticultural species are seldom used by native butterflies and *J. orithya* is seen only infrequently along the Arabian Gulf coast, so BR collected the caterpillar along with host plant material, which he refreshed from his workplace, and reared it at home to confirm its identity.

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After five evenings, having eaten only fitfully in captivity, the caterpillar disappeared from its plant pot and made its way to pupate on the pane of a sliding glass door, where BR found it the next morning. It hung there for another day, its hind end fastened to the glass by a silken pad, before sloughing its larval skin to expose a pale grey-brown chrysalis (Fig. 2).

**Figure 2** – The *Junonia orithya* pupa on a glass door.

Eleven days later, the butterfly had emerged by late morning and perched motionless on the glass. GRF transferred it to a mesh container where by 13h00 it began to flex its wings, revealing that it was an apparently normal *J. orithya* male. The colour pattern on the upper side confirmed it was a *J. orithya* male. The butterfly was then promptly returned to its original petunia patch at Mushrif Park, where it flew briefly onto a leaf before settling down to bask in dappled sunlight on a nearby ornamental

boulder (Fig. 3), folding its wings at intervals, until it was left alone an hour later. No other butterflies or caterpillars were seen on any of the many other petunia beds in the vicinity, on either visit.

**Figure 3** – The recently emerged *Junonia orithya* male, basking after its return to Mushrif Park.

*J. orithya* uses a broad spectrum of larval host plants across its global range. In the UAE alone, at least half a dozen host plant species from five families have been reported, in both natural and plantation environments (Feulner *et al*., in prep.). Petunias, however, which have their origin in South America, have not previously been recorded for *J. orithya*. Moreover, Solanaceae species of any kind are used as larval host plants by only a very few other Old World butterflies (Robinson *et al*., online).

## LITERATURE CITED

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