

THROUGH THE LEPIDOPTERAN LENS

The American Lady: An uncommon migrant

BY LINDA KAPPEN



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The American Lady, *Vanessa virginiensis*, is a butterfly of the Nymphalidae family, also known as Brushfoots.

The wingspan of the American Lady can reach to 2.25 inches. The dorsal view (upperside) is colored mostly orange. The apex of the forewing has a black patch with white spots and a white or light orange bar. Below this patch is an orange section with a single white dot inside the orange. Both sets of wings have lavender-colored edges. On the ventral view (underside) there are two large eyespots. A leaflike pattern covers the area in a soft light brown, with cream-colored lines and webbing.

Males perch to find females. Females will lay a single egg on host plants. The larvae live singly in their own nests of silk.



An American Lady butterfly chrysalis.



A dorsal (upperside) view of an adult American Lady butterfly.



A pair of caterpillars that will become American Ladies.



A ventral (underside) view of an adult American Lady (*Vanessa virginiensis*).

The main host plants for this species are pearly everlasting, pussytoe, cudweed, Artemisia, Oregon sunshine, and many others. Adults use nectar of garden flowers, milkweed, aster, dogbane, and many other wildflowers.

sunny habitats with fields of flowers in parks, gardens, and mountains.

As a migrant, the American Lady sometimes will have the right conditions for migrating north from warmer southern

climates, but not like the mass migrations of the Painted Lady. They are not known to overwinter in colder climates. They can have a few broods throughout the summer and can be seen in flight from early summer to late fall. They were plentiful this summer in the Applegate and surrounding areas.

I observed a possible three broods between summer and fall of 2022 in Applegate, Oregon, starting at the Applegate School. During late summer, Kristina Lefever of Pollinator Project of the Rogue Valley had a flat of pearly everlasting getting ready for sale when they found 50 or more American Lady larvae living on the plants. She kindly gave me eight larvae to rear. We were both challenged at finding larval food plants for them, and we were both successful.

There were many sightings of the American Lady throughout Oregon and Washington this past summer. It was a welcome sight and a pleasure to see so many arrive and hang around from early summer through the warm and sunny days of fall.

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All photos by Linda Kappen.

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