

# These male butterflies provide a chastity belt

BY LINDA KAPPEN

The Clodius Parnassian (common name), or *Parnassius clodius* (scientific name), belongs to the great butterfly family of Papilionidae.

It is a large white butterfly with gray markings along the edges of semitransparent wings. The female has red spots and a red bar outlined in black at the bottom of the hindwings with a shiny black abdomen. The male has two red spots outlined in black on the hind wing with a furry abdomen appearing yellowish in color. Both have solid black antennae.

The male will patrol habitats in search of females. Once mated, the male attaches a waxy, white-pinkish pouch, called a sphragis, to the female to prevent further mating. This helps ensure that only the genes from that particular male will be passed to her offspring.

The females will lay single eggs on the host plant. The host plant for the Clodius Parnassian in our area of the Pacific Northwest is Bleeding Heart (*Dicentra Formosa*). Caterpillars will feed on the host plant and pupate in a loose silk cocoon. Over-wintering will be in the egg stage. Adults use flowers for nectar.

These white beauties are quite common in the western United States and western Canada. They can be seen in flight from May to September. In southern Oregon the Clodius Parnassian's habitat is in low- to mid-elevation mountain areas where bleeding heart grows. The Clodius Parnassian likes to fly in subalpine

meadows, open woodlands, creek riparian areas, canyons, rocky outcrops, and sometimes on a favorite trail.

I like to recall one of the first experiences I had with the Clodius Parnassian in the upper Applegate area, on one of those early summer days when everything comes alive and the mountains are still looking like spring. A friend and I went out butterflying on a local mountain road. We got out of the car, nets in hand for catching and observing. The air was filled with butterflies! A big white butterfly was flying from the woods down the road. On that small riparian corridor next to a creek we chased the Parnassians. The run was as purely exhausting as the butterfly was pure white. They gave us such a run I finally gave up that day.

On another outing somewhere in the southern Oregon mountains, we hiked above the road a few hundred yards to a spot where we saw butterflies flying. I netted what I thought was a huge Parnassian. When we carefully retrieved the butterfly from the net, we found it was actually a mating pair who had been flying by. My butterflying friend took them out of the net, so the pair was in her hands. They readjusted their activity easily as she held them. We silently waited, counting the seconds. After about 30 seconds, that pair had had enough, and they flew away! Another amazing fun day in the mountains!

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A ventral view of a male Clodius Parnassian on a dandelion in the Siskiyou Mountains. Note the difference in red spots between the male and female (see photo below), and the presence of a lower bar marking on the female only.  
Photo: Linda Kappen.



A ventral view of a female Clodius Parnassian perched on horsemint. Photo: Linda Kappen.

