

THROUGH THE LEPIDOPTERAN LENS

The lovely Leanira

BY LINDA KAPPEN

The Leanira Checkerspot (*Chlosyne leanira oregonensis*) is a sought-after beauty considered a lifer find for some butterfly enthusiasts in the Pacific Northwest. This species, of the butterfly family Nymphalidae, can be challenging to find in its isolated pockets of colonies throughout southern Oregon.

The Leanira's wingspan can reach up to two inches. On the dorsal view, the male is black with some orange on the outer edges. The female has orange and pale yellow spots with black veining. The ventral view displays a unique and unmistakable row of white dots and markings with black in between.

Ventral view of a male Leanira Checkerspot on a plant in the lotus family. Photo: Linda Kappen.



The host plants are flowers and leaves of *Castilleja* (paintbrushes) of the Orobanchaceae family of plants. The eggs are laid in a mass on the host plant. The caterpillars form a protective web while they feed. They disperse at the third instar (a stage in its life between two successive molts) to hibernate through the following months. As the plant appears in the spring, they feed again to become adult butterflies. Adults feed on nectar of many wildflowers and will come to mud.

The Leanira Checkerspot can be



Dorsal view of a male Leanira Checkerspot. Photo: Linda Kappen.

seen in flight from late April to late July. Habitats for the beautiful Leanira Checkerspot are hillsides and small canyons near mountain streams at low to mid elevations where the host plant grows nearby. In our area, the range of this species is the southernmost area of southern Oregon to eastern Oregon.

My first experience with this butterfly was in 2012 in the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest of the greater Applegate Valley. Then I saw it every few years up to this year. I may have missed their flight in some years or perhaps they

were concentrated elsewhere. We have also seen them in the Onion Mountain area and have documented reports in the Kalmiopsis area as well as in our Siskiyou mountains. This lovely butterfly with its striking appearance is a delicate and pretty example of the great diversity of butterfly populations throughout southern Oregon. While taking in minerals from the mud, it can be busy enough to get what is called a "belly shot," meaning laying yourself flat on the ground to get a straight-on view with your camera to record this beauty. If you can catch them on nearby flowering bushes, taking a photo becomes a bit easier. What a pretty butterfly to encounter welcoming the warm spring and early summer months.

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