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A Tropical Butterfly Visits Virginia

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A male Mimic butterfly, *Hypolimnas misippus* (Linnaeus), was collected on 17 September 2016 near Waynesboro, Augusta County, Virginia. Another male Mimic was photographed in the same area the next day (Fig. 1). A male was again observed there on 22 September 2016. Dave Wenger, a naturalist and owner/operator of Wenger Vineyard discovered these butterflies as they fed on some grapes that had been accidentally dropped.

Two of the larval food plants of the Mimic are Mallow (Malvaceae) and Morning Glory (*Ipomoea*) (Klots, 1951). The butterflies were found in or near an area where these food plants were growing. This and the fact that the butterflies were in perfect, freshly emerged condition suggests that they were progeny of a female Mimic that visited the area earlier in the summer. Repeated searches of this area did not produce any additional sightings.

The Mimic exhibits two phenomena that are seen frequently in butterflies. One is sexual dimorphism in which the two sexes have a different form or appearance. The other is Batesian mimicry which allows a mimic to gain protection from predators by appearing very similar to another species of butterfly, the model, that is distasteful or poisonous. The model, typically, has a bold, highly visible color pattern that a predator can easily remember and will avoid. Once a predator learns that a butterfly with a particular color pattern is distasteful, the predator will avoid all butterflies with that pattern including the mimic.

The model for the Mimic butterfly is *Danaus chrysippus* (Linnaeus), also known as the Plain Tiger or African Monarch, a species that occurs in southern Asia and Africa. This butterfly feeds on milkweed in the larval stage and is thought to be poisonous due to toxins produced by the milkweed. Only females of the Mimic actually mimic *D. chrysippus*, whereas male Mimics are mimics in name only (Smart, 1975).

The Mimic butterfly is also native to southern Asia and Africa (Smart, 1975). It was introduced into the Caribbean region, possibly by a slave ship (Klots, 1951), where it now occurs without a model. There is some evidence that the butterfly may also have arrived on its own via trans-Atlantic wind-borne dispersal (Smith



Fig. 1. A male Mimic butterfly, *Hypolimnas misippus* (Linnaeus), shares a feast of grape juice with honeybees on grapes that were accidentally dropped at Wenger Vineyard near Waynesboro, Virginia, 18 September 2016. (Photo: Kristi Stoltzfus)

et al., 1994). The Mimic is now resident in Venezuela and the Guianas (Smith et al., 1994). It has been found a number of times in the southeastern United States, most often in Florida (Klots, 1951), but also in North Carolina (LeGrand & Howard, 2017) and there is one recent record from Cape May, New Jersey (Reese, 2002). The September 2016 sightings are believed to be the first known occurrence of this species in Virginia.

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