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Biodiversity Journal

www.biodiversityjournal.com

DECEMBER, 2010, 1(1-4): 1-58

ISSN 2039-0394 (Print Edition)
ISSN 2039-0408 (Online Edition)

FOR NATURALISTIC RESEARCH
AND ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES



Parnassius apollo (Linnaeus, 1758) - Sicily, Italy



The genus *Parnassius* Latreille, 1804 (Lepidoptera, Papilionidae) comprises about 50 species of northern circumpolar and mountain (alpine and Himalayan) butterflies usually known as Apollos (or Mountain Apollos). Although classified under the Swallowtail butterfly group, none of the *Parnassius* species possess tails. These animals vary significantly in colour and form and generally show several black and red black-edged "eye marks" on their white wings.

For centuries, the beauty and the rarity of these species have attracted the interest of collectors, and, at the same time, the genus became of great interest to entomologists due to its fascinating biology and biogeography, which made it one of the most studied groups of insects.

These beautiful butterflies inhabit mountain flowery meadows and pastures. The distribution area of the genus - which is likely to have reached the maximum span in the Tertiary and the Quaternary eras - drastically reduced and fragmented during the interglacial periods, thus originating many endemic taxa. The larvae feed on species of plants belonging to the Papaveraceae and Crassulaceae families.

Currently, the Apollo is on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals, in Appendix II in CITES and is mentioned in annex IV of Habitats Directive. For this reason it is protected by special laws in many countries.

P. apollo (Linnaeus, 1758) - widespread in Europe and Central Asia - comprises a high number of subspecies and local races, some of which with uncertain taxonomic status. *Parnassius apollo siciliae* was described by Charles Oberthür in 1891 for specimens from the Madonie mountains. However, a few years before, the entomologist Failla Tedaldi had already reported some differences in the wings-pattern among the Sicilian and other Italian populations.

Parnassius apollo siciliae (see pictures) caterpillar's favorite food plant is stonecrop (*Sedum*). Larvae finish their metamorphosis in May and adults live until August, with one generation per year.

At the moment, even if sicilian population is in good condition, nevertheless protection constraints are still necessary to save it from the extinction that already wiped away other European *Parnassius* species due to habitat fragmentation and indiscriminate collection.

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