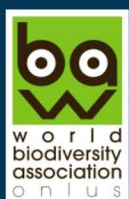


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Zerynthia cassandra (Geyer, [1828]) - Italy, Sicily: Parco delle Madonie, Monte Quacella

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Zerynthia cassandra (Geyer, [1828]) (Lepidoptera Papilionidae). Following genetic analysis, *Zerynthia cassandra* has been classified as different from *Z. polyxena* ([Denis & Schiffermüller], 1775). It has been observed that *Z. cassandra* lives everywhere geographically located south of the Po River (Peninsular Italy, Elba Island and Sicily), which marks the boundary between the distribution areas of the two species. *Z. cassandra* is thus an endemic Italian species. The two species are morphologically distinguishable only due to male genitalia. *Z. polyxena* is protected by the Council Directive 92/43/EEC (Annex IV) and by the Berne Convention (Annex 2). However, *Z. cassandra* has not yet been included in these lists. *Zerynthia cassandra* is a monovoltine species that comes out of the chrysalis from March to May depending on the altitude (as it hibernates inside the chrysalis) and with a rather short flight period; it lives in humid environments, garrigue formations, glades in the wood and woods from the plain up to 1300 meters of altitude, with small localized colonies. Its presence is closely tied to the food plants of the caterpillars: various species of the genus *Aristolochia*, which are uncommon and highly poisonous due to a toxic alkaloid (aristolochic acid). The caterpillar, like the adult insect, shows warning aposematic colors to discourage potential predators. The population of this butterfly is in slight decline in most of its distribution area due to summer fires, which destroy the chrysalises, and the reduction and alteration of natural habitats where the *Aristolochia*, plants very sensitive to environmental variations, grow.

