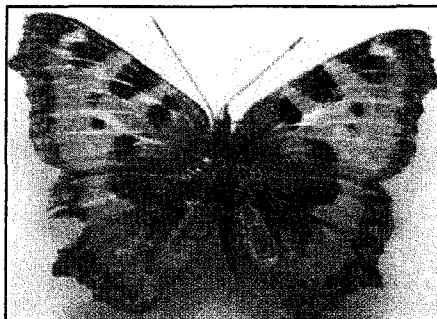


The presence of *Aglais urticae* (Lepidoptera: Nymphalidae) in the Maltese islands

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The first mention of the presence of the Small Tortoiseshell, *Aglais urticae*, in the Maltese islands was by T.B Fletcher in 1904-05 who mentions that a specimen was "noticed" by Gervase F. Mathew on March 23rd 1892. It was also repeatedly mentioned by a number of other authors (as either *Aglais* or *Vanessa urticae*) (Bainbridge-Fletcher, 1904, 1905; Caruana-Gatto, 1925; P. Borg, 1932; J. Borg, 1939; De Lucca, 1950 and Sammut 2000)) but considerable doubt was cast on the validity of *A. urticae* records, so much so that Sammut (2000) regards these as based on probable misidentifications.

On May 14th 1985 Mr. E. Cardona captured a specimen of *Aglais urticae* at Wied Hanzir, Qormi and in his collection it was misidentified as another species. In late 2002 the specimen was definitely identified by Paul Sammut as *Aglais urticae*. The information that the collector provided was that in those days he never collected outside the Maltese Islands so there could be no doubt that the specimen was captured in Malta. The specimen was taken during a *Vanessa cardui* migration. (E. Cardona, personal communication) On November 23rd 2003 one of the authors (AS) collected a number of *Vanessa cardui* specimens on a *Lantana camara* shrub at Marsa Racourse; while the specimens were on the setting boards Mr. J.Sciberras noted that one of the specimens was different, and it was definitely identified as *Aglais urticae*. This specimen was also caught during a *Vanessa cardui* migration. It is now in one of the authors (ES) private collection. In the period 13th November - 4th December, there were other possible but, unconfirmed, sightings of the species.



The Marsa specimen

The Wied Hanzir and Marsa Racecourse records can be regarded as the only reliable confirmed records of *Aglais urticae* in the Maltese Islands, and the species can therefore be added to the list of Maltese butterflies. We propose the Maltese name of this species as **Qoxra ta' Fekruna Zghira** since the Maltese name for *Nymphalis polychloros*, commonly known as the large tortoise shell, is **Qoxra ta' Fekruna**.

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