COSMOPOLITAN BUTTERFLY PAINTED LADY

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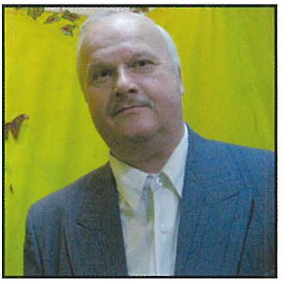


In the Maltese Islands, there are about 40 species of butterflies. Some of the butterfly species are migratory, others reside in the Islands and the status of some of them is threatened. The Painted Lady is the butterfly which often migrates in large numbers **(Photo 1)**. The most cosmopolitan of all butterflies, the Painted Lady occurs practically worldwide. Almost all of Europe, Asia, North America, Africa, Australia, Central America, and numerous island groups in the Caribbean, Atlantic, Indian and Pacific oceans are home to this species, at least for part of the year. There are no populations in South America south of Venezuela or in the polar regions, although the species occasionally flies north of the Arctic Circle. The Painted Lady is sometimes called the Cosmopolite or Cosmopolitan because of this wide distribution.

(Photo 1 - Stamp of Malta 1986 with tab and butterfly Painted Lady)

The aptly named Painted Lady wears splashes and dots of colors on her wings. The adult butterfly's wings are orange and brown on the upper side **(Photo 2)**. The leading edge of the forewing appears black with a prominent white bar and smaller white spots. The underside of the wings is markedly duller, in shades of brown and gray. When the butterfly sits at rest with wings folded together, four small eyespots are noticeable on the hindwing. The Painted Lady's mottled colors look much like military camouflage, and provide effective cover from potential predators. Painted ladies reach 5-6 centimeters in width, smaller than some other brush-footed butterflies.

(Photo 2 - Imperforated stamp of Hungary 1969 with butterfly Painted Lady)

(Photo 3 - Imperforated pair stamps of Tunisia 1994 with life cycle of butterfly Painted Lady)

Painted Ladies live about a year, from egg to death. Females lay about 500 eggs, each egg singly laid on a plant that the caterpillar will eat when it hatches **(Photo 3)**. Adults live for about 10 to 24 days

after emerging from their cocoons. In warm climates producing up to 6 generations in a year.

The Painted Lady was one of the first butterflies that were described by the famous Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus in 1758 and named Vanessa cardui **(Photo 4)**. The scientific name cardui comes from the Latin carduus, which means "thistle", because this plant is a favorite food of caterpillars and adult butterflies. Painted Lady butterflies feed on many different plants. Adults eat nectar from flowers, such as aster, cosmos, blazing star, iron weed, joe-pye, red clover, button bush, privet, milkweeds, and thistles. Caterpillars eat the leaves from plants such as thistles, dwarf nettle, lupine, fiddleneck, and many different members of the daisy family. Caterpillars of the Painted Lady feed on a large variety of plants **(Photo 5)**, but they have a preference for thistle and thus they contribute to the destruction of many common weeds.

(Photo 4 - Stamp of Malta 2002 with butterfly Vanessa cardui)

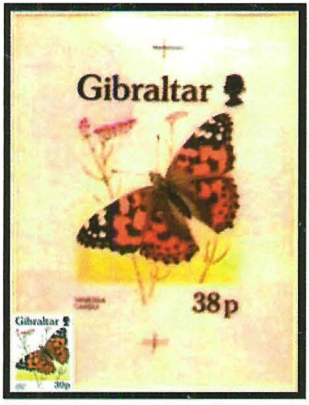
From the ecological standpoint, the Painted Lady butterfly is a generalist, highly tolerant of different habitats. It can be found in heavily wooded areas, as well as open areas, such as waste areas, roadsides, farmers' fields, and areas where thistles abound **(Photo 6)**. Painted Ladies live in areas with wide open areas of plants such as fields and meadows. They can also be found in suburban, agricultural, swamp, bog, marsh, tundra, taiga, desert or dune, chaparral, forest, rainforest, scrub forest, and mountain habitats as well.

(Photo 5 - S/s of Barbuda 1991 with caterpillar of Painted Lady)

(Photo 6 - Stationery card of Belarus 2007 with butterfly Vanessa cardui and thistle)

These butterflies can adjust to living in pretty much any habitat. Extreme migration looks like a difficult lifestyle choice for a butterfly, but the Painted Lady neatly solves the problem of too-cold European winters and too-dry African summers. To do so, it needs strength, but also supreme adaptability: its caterpillar's ability to feed on a wide variety of foodplants has made it the world's most cosmopolitan butterfly.

Some years, when southern populations reach large numbers or weather conditions are right, painted ladies will migrate north and expand their range temporarily. These migrations sometimes occur in phenomenal numbers, filling the skies with butterflies.



(Photo 7 -Artwork and normal stamp of Gibraltar 1997 with butterfly Painted Lady)

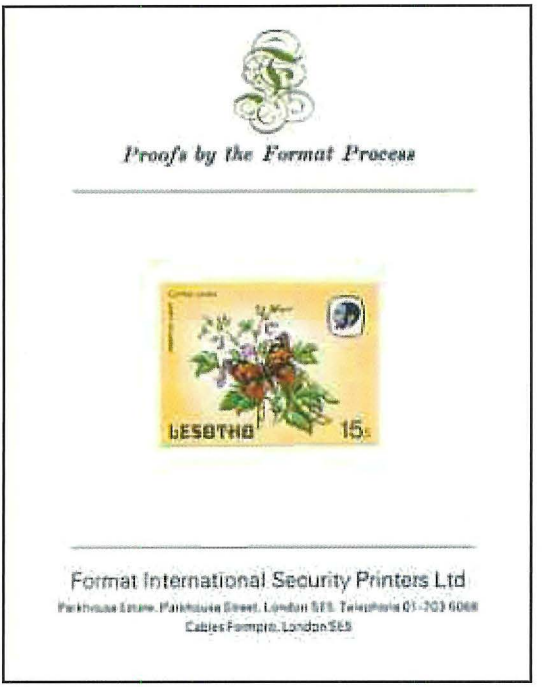
The adults that reach the colder areas will not survive the winter, however. These medium-sized butterflies can cover a lot of ground, up to 100 miles per day during their migration. A Painted Lady is capable of reaching a speed of nearly 30 miles per hour. Painted Ladies reach northern areas well ahead of some of their more famous migrating cousins, like monarch butterflies. And because they get such an early start to their spring travel, migrating painted ladies will feed on spring annuals. Every year, Painted Lady butterflies **(Photo 7)** make huge migrations from Africa to Europe and back again. They also do this in North America, from Mexico to northern United States and Canada and back again. The migrations can be up to 15000 km long. In the spring, they begin moving north as the temperatures become too warm in Africa or Mexico. Along the way, they mate and reproduce. Since most adult butterflies do not live more than a month, it is not just one generation of butterfly that makes this migration. Instead, it is their offspring and their offsprings' offspring that make the journey. Millions of butterflies can make this journey, though some years there are far less. They reach the northern parts of Europe and North America during the summer, when temperatures are just right for the butterflies. They continue to reproduce, and then they start flying back south in late summer and fall, when temperatures become too cold in the north.

(Photo 8 - Proof of Maldive Islands 1993 with with flying butterfly Painted Lady)

In 1948 a mass invasion of the butterfly into the British Isles was recorded and there was a case in the Mediterranean Sea where a motor vessel had an accident because of the Painted Lady! The clouds of migrating butterflies covered the wheelhouse and the helmsman lost his bearings and put the ship on an underwater rock formation. Radar records revealed that Painted Ladies fly at an average altitude of over 500 metres on their southbound trip and can clock up speeds

of 30 mph by selecting favourable conditions **(Photo 8)**. This species undertakes a phenomenal 9,000-mile (14,000 km) round trip from tropical Africa to the Arctic Circle—almost double the length of the famous migrations undertaken by Monarch butterflies in North America. The extent of the annual journey undertaken by the Painted Lady butterfly is astonishing. This tiny creature, weighing less than a gram, with a brain the size of a pinhead and no opportunity to learn from older, experienced individuals, undertakes an epic intercontinental migration in order to find plants for its caterpillars to eat.

Painted Ladies pollinate the plants and flowers in their habitat. Painted Ladies have been recorded feeding from more than 100 plant species, so they can have a big effect on many plant species. Painted Lady butterflies pollinate plants when they feed on the nectar **(Photo 9)**. Some of these plants may be plants that humans use, so by pollinating them, the butterflies help the plants reproduce, which is helpful to humans. Butterflies are also an important species to study, since changes in butterfly populations can show that there are changes in the ecosystem. If the number of butterflies decreases, scientists will know to look for bad changes in the ecosystem, such as pollution or habitat loss.



(Photo 9 - Proof of Lesotho stamp 1984 - butterfly Painted Lady pollinate flowers)

Butterflies are the most beautiful creations of nature, the top of its artistic mastery, undoubted masterpieces of evolution. Collect postage stamps with butterflies!

Author always glad to help for philatelists in creation or improve of philatelic exhibit on butterflies and moths. My address for letters is the next: Vladimir Kachan, street Kulibina 9-49, Minsk-52, BY-220052, Republic of Belarus, e-mail: vladimirkachan@mail.ru