



Desert Metalmark

Apodemia mejicanus deserti

Adult

Of the three members of the *Apodemia mormo* complex, the desert metalmark appears to be pretty much the same in wing patterns throughout California. In Arizona and New Mexico this species changes dramatically. One subspecies has extensive orange-red dorsally, while another population (or subspecies) has individuals that are extremely large (like *maxima*). The other two California species change drastically in wing patterns going west through the San Bernardino and San Gabriel Mountains. But in JOTR, these three taxa are pretty consistent in wing patterns.

The desert metalmark can occur practically any time of the year, while the Mojave and Mormon metalmarks are single-brooded and only occur in the spring and late summer, respectively. The desert metalmark occurs in many habitats throughout the park up to about 4,500 feet elevation. The other two species prefer habitats above 4,000 feet. For this reason, the three members of the complex really only overlap at elevations around 4,000 to 4,500 feet, largely along the edges of the Little San Bernardino Mountains and perhaps the Eagle and Coxcomb Mountains.

Food plants

The larval food plants of this taxon are the most variable of the *Apodemia mormo* complex. Pratt suspects that even *Krameria* species are used by *Apodemia mejicanus deserti*. In any case *Apodemia mejicanus* uses *Krameria* in Texas. Pratt has found caterpillars even on *Oxytheca perfoliata* and several species of *Eriogonum* annuals, such as *E. deflexum*. The most favored food plant is the desert trumpet, *Eriogonum inflatum*, including both varieties, *inflatum* and *deflatum*.

Pre-adult

As with the other two species in this complex, the caterpillars make shelters where they spend most of their caterpillar life. Mature caterpillars are largely dark grayish blue-purple, with yellow patches and clusters of short black setae on top of protuberances (verrucae) on each larval segment. Often a long, light-colored seta comes out of the center of each verruca of short stout black setae. Generally caterpillars that are exposed to the sun are lighter in color than caterpillars buried within the wild buckwheat food plant. Often the younger caterpillars make shelters in the flowers or leaves, and older caterpillars make shelters in the inflated stalk of *Eriogonum inflatum*. With the variety *deflatum*, which lacks the inflated stalks, these caterpillars often form shelters at the base of the plants. If these caterpillars are like the other two species, they may even form shelters long distances from their caterpillar food plants, sometimes several meters from the nearest buckwheat. It is thought that the caterpillar has laid a pheromone trail leading to their food plant.