



Janita's Tussock

Argyrophenaga janitae

Description

A native species of Butterfly that still needs farther study & whose life history is not well known. Suspected lifecycle is one year in most of its range & maybe longer in the sub-alpine areas of range, since third, fourth & fifth instar larvae have been found in early spring in Tussocks adjacent to snow patches after overwintering. It is very well camouflaged with closed wings, as they have silver streaks on the underside of the back wings that blend in with grass blades. Its range overlaps Harris's Tussock in the Tasman Mountains where both species fly together. It shares most of its range with the Common Tussock where, Janita's Tussock will stay above the beech forest line & the Common Tussock will stay below this altitude. But when the forest is absent, Janita's Tussock tend to fly in areas of Chionochloa - large Snow Tussocks, whereas the Common Tussock will fly in areas of Festuca & Poa - small Tussocks & other grasses. The ovum & pupa are nearly the same on all 3 Tussock Butterfly species. It's named after Janita Craw who assisted her husband in identifying this Tussock Butterfly as its own species.

Ovum (Egg)

Ovum are either laid singularly on the foodplant or dropped when flying above the foodplant. Uniform white to pale-green for first 2 days, then become mottled brown in colour. Just before hatching the general colouration becomes silvery due to a layer of air between the shell & the larva inside. Barrel-shaped with 15-18 vertical ribs. They hatch after approx 6 days. Upon hatching, the larva chews around the crown & pushes it up to leave, then most of the shell is eaten by the newly hatched larva for its first meal.

Larvae

It is sleek leaf-green with slightly darker stripes down the side, tapers towards the tail & has distinguishing white setae on the main part of the body & longer setae on the rear end. It has a bifid head & tail. They have 5 instars. They usually spend their resting time head-down below the notch they are presently eating. This can take several days as they are slow eaters. They eat through the leaves of Tussock or grass leaving small elongated notches along the margin. As they are elongated larvae & almost the same colour as the leaves, they are very well camouflaged. They are very similar to the Forest Ringlet larvae, but unlike the Forest Ringlet, the first instar larvae have a pale-brown head instead of a black head. Tussock larvae also have setae which are absent on the Forest Ringlet. Before pupating, they spend about 2 days head-down on a leaf with their anal prolegs attached to a

silken pad, however they use all their prolegs to hold onto the leaf unlike the Forest Ringlet, which hangs free. Grows up to 28mm when fully grown.



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Pupa

Greenish with varying markings & a forked head. It is elongated & attached to Tussock leaves by cremaster & usually lies flat along a blade for disguise in the heart of the plant. Pupation lasts between 12 to 18 days.



Imago

The imago has a 31-45mm wingspan, female average is 40mm & is usually slightly larger wingspan than the males, however those around the Dun Mountain area of Nelson are smaller, this maybe due to a mineral belt that also seems to have a dwarfing effect on Forest Ringlet as well. Flight is weak & takes on a hopping appearance. They quite often land roughly & then have to find their footing. In full sun they keep their wings wide open, but quickly close them if there is any disturbance, including wind. Both genders have black spots with 2 white ocelli on the forewings & several black spots with 1 white ocelli each on the hindwings. Even so the ocelli are on the upper wing surface, they show through to the underside. The male has a long slender abdomen while the female has a short stout abdomen. Differs from the Common Tussock by having heavily outlined veins on both wings & differs from Harris's Tussock by having larger orange patches on both wings. There is hardly any sexual dimorphism in lower altitudes, however in higher altitudes the males become paler & the females become brighter. The definitive feature of Janita's Tussock is that it does not have the silver margin to underside of the hindwings like the other 2 Tussock Butterflies. Males appear more common, but is probably due to them spending more time on the wing.



Male



Habitat

Montane to subalpine tussock, between altitudes of 500-2000m.

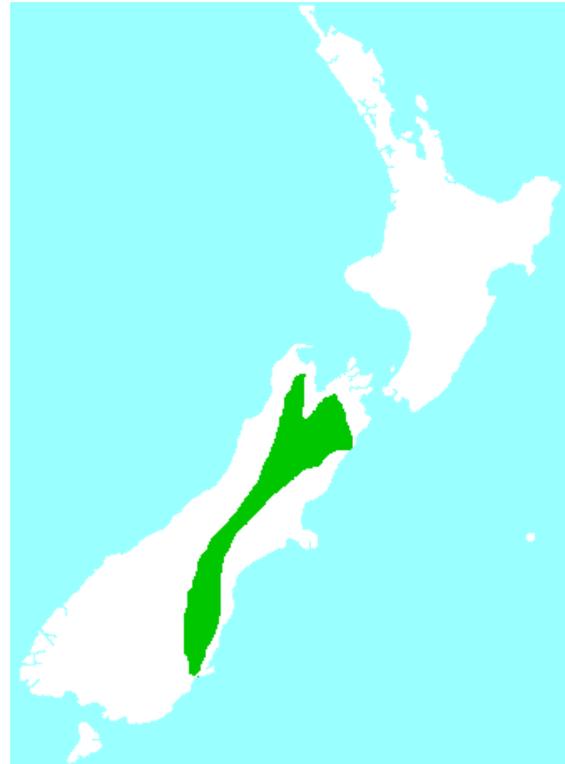
Food Plants

Snow Tussock (*Chionochloa* spp)

Status

Common - Found in the eastern Southern Alps from Nelson to north Otago. It has declined due to improved pastures for farm animals & burning of Tussock areas to improve the palatability of Tussocks for Sheep.

Distribution



Female



Phenology

	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
Adult							■	■	■	■	■	
Egg							■	■	■	■	■	
Caterpillar	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Pupa						■	■	■	■	■		



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