



Editorial

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There are about 34 species of birdwing butterflies that range from India, southern mainland Asia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, to eastern Australia. Two genera of birdwings, *Ornithoptera* (13 spp.) and *Troides* (19 spp.), are usually recognised as distinct but have sometimes been synonymised. A third genus, *Trogonoptera* (2 spp.), occurs only in Southeast Asia.

Birdwings belong to the butterfly family Papilionidae (apollós, swallowtails and birdwings) of which there are approximately 700 species throughout the world. Most Papilionidae are large butterflies and the birdwings have wingspans often between 14 and 17 cms.

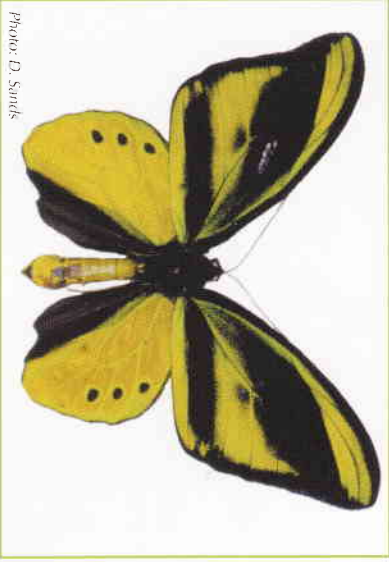


Photo: D. Sands

Ornithoptera chimaera

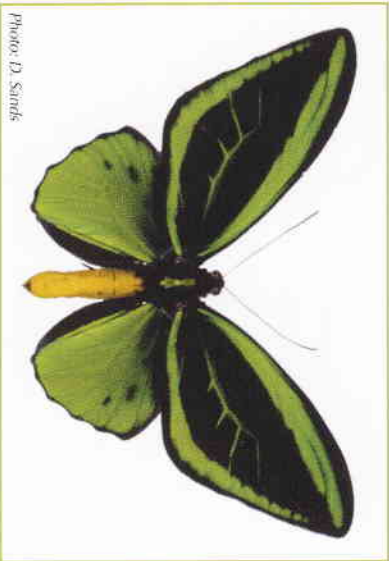


Photo: D. Sands

Ornithoptera priamus poseidon

Ornithoptera chimaera (Rothschild) occurs at high altitudes above 600 metres in Papua New Guinea. *Ornithoptera priamus poseidon* Doubleday is found from mainland Papua New Guinea to the middle of the Torres Strait. *Troides oblongomaculatus papuensis* (Wallace) is found across Papua New Guinea, mainly in lowland areas. *Ornithoptera paradisea borchii* Haugum and Low is restricted to mainland New Guinea.



Photo: D. Sands

Ornithoptera paradisea borchii



Photo: D. Sands

Troides oblongomaculatus papuensis

The largest, the female of Queen Alexandra's Birdwing, *Ornithoptera alexandrae* (Rothschild) from PNG, sometimes reaches more than 29 cm. The smallest papilionids, the long-tailed dragontail butterflies (*Lamproptera* spp.) from India and Malaysia, have wingspans of less than 5 cm.

Some species of birdwing butterflies are very common and others are considered rare. They are recognised worldwide as 'flagships' for insect conservation and many species have declined in abundance resulting from loss of their rainforest habitats and food plants. They are very popular as cabinet specimens and some species are said to have suffered from over-collecting. The demand for specimens has been partly met by 'ranching' and captive breeding programs but wild-caught specimens are also sold. Some species are considered to be threatened with extinction, but more often these species have been categorised as 'at risk' simply because they are scarce and highly sought after. Inappropriate policies directed at conservation have sometimes had the opposite effect to those desired, and restrictions on the collecting, sale and international trade of 'secure' species of birdwings have actually inhibited conservation efforts and diverted attention from the 'threatened' species. An assessment of the threatening processes for all birdwings is long overdue to identify any species at risk and those not at risk, and to concentrate on those in need of recovery actions.

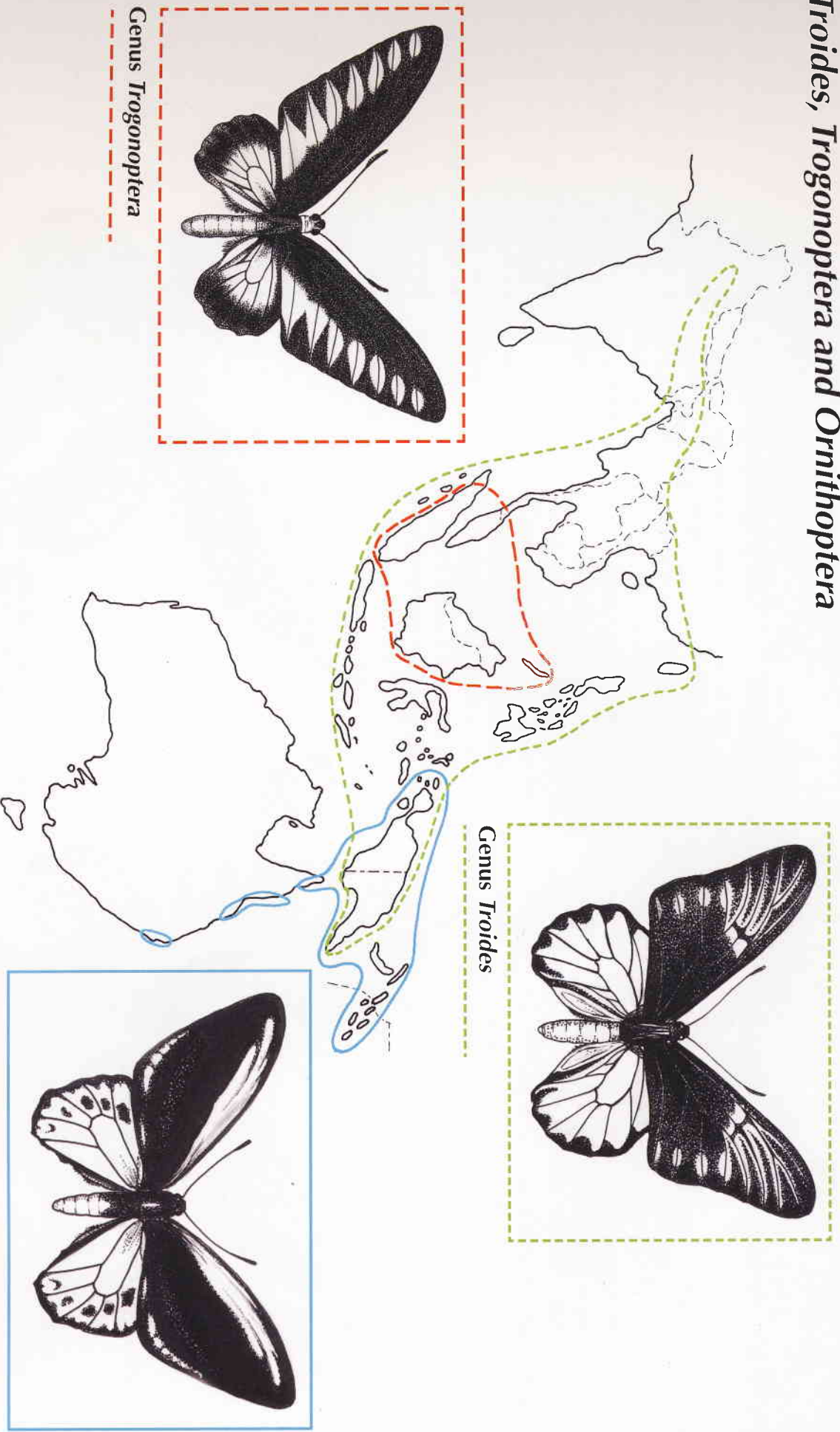
This booklet provides a snapshot of some birdwing butterfly conservation projects that have been undertaken over the past 13 years.



Photo: D. Sands

Ornithoptera alexandrae (Queen Alexandra's Birdwing - female)

Distribution of the genera *Troides*, *Trogonoptera* and *Ornithoptera*



Map and line drawings: S. Sands