

## NOTE

### A new locality for *Thestor dicksoni malagas* Dickson & Wykeham, 1994 (Lepidoptera: Lycaenidae: Miletinae) in the Western Cape Province, South Africa

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## INTRODUCTION

The butterfly known as the Atlantic Skolly (*Thestor dicksoni malagas* Dickson & Wykeham, 1994) belongs to the purely southern African genus *Thestor* Hübner, 1819. This genus currently contains 27 species, many of which are rare and localized. *Thestor malagas* was originally described as a new species but ten years later it was formally downgraded to a subspecies of *Thestor dicksoni* Riley, 1954 (Heath & Pringle, 2004).

The butterfly was discovered by two school boys, Harald Selb and Timothy Waters, on 14 March 1981. They found a colony of the insect on the western side of the Langebaan Peninsula, close to the sea shoreline. David Edge (in LepiMap; <http://vmus.adu.org.za>) gives the GPS coordinates for the type locality as 33° 08' 26" S, 17° 58' 42" E (red dot in Fig. 1). *T. d. malagas* was assessed in the Southern African Butterfly Conservation Assessment (SABCA) (Mecenero *et al.*, 2013) as 'Vulnerable', with a single known locality, and an Extent of Occurrence (EOO) of 97 km<sup>2</sup>.

## OBSERVATIONS

On 18 March, 2019 my grandson Alexander and I located a colony of the butterfly on the sea shore in the village of Jacobs Bay, 6 km north-west of Saldanha and 20 km north of the type locality of *T. d. malagas* at Langebaan. The GPS coordinates for this colony are 32° 58' 21" S, 17° 53' 09" E (yellow dot in Fig. 1). The population appeared to be confined to a densely vegetated fossil dune about 230 m long and about 50 m wide (outlined in red in Fig. 2). It was subjectively estimated, based on the number of male territories counted, that about 40 individuals were present on this day. While males (Figs 3 & 4) actively defended their territories from other males, females (Figs 5 & 6) were sluggish and hence were not as often encountered.

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**Figure 1** – Type locality (red dot) and new locality (yellow dot) for *Thestor dicksoni malagas*.



**Figure 2** – New locality for *Thestor dicksoni malagas* at Jacobs Bay. Extent of colony outlined in red.

## DISCUSSION

In view of the conservation status of *T. d. malagas* as Vulnerable (Mecenero *et al.*, 2013), the discovery of a second locality for the subspecies considerably lessens the threat that it may become extinct. Since the type locality is in the West Coast National Park, this population is afforded official protection even though it is not mentioned in the management plan 2013 to 2023 for the Park ([https://www.sanparks.org/assets/docs/conservation/park\\_man/west\\_coast\\_approved\\_plan.pdf](https://www.sanparks.org/assets/docs/conservation/park_man/west_coast_approved_plan.pdf)). The newly found locality at Jacobs Bay is hemmed in by



**Figures 3 & 4** – *Thestor dicksoni malagas* male recto (left) and verso (right).



**Figures 5 & 6** – *Thestor dicksoni malagas* female recto (left) and verso (right).

houses and crossed by numerous tracks and footpaths, and the habitat could very easily be destroyed by anthropogenic activity. Management plans for these two sites are urgently needed.

Both localities for the butterfly are located in Langebaan Dune Strandveld (FS 5) (Mucina & Rutherford, 2006). This vegetation type occurs in three separate bands, each of variable width, along the West Coast, from Elands Bay in the north to Silverboomstrand at Bokbaai (west of Atlantis). This is a total of more than 200 km of coastline. If the vegetation type is suitable for the butterfly there is the possibility of more undiscovered colonies of *T. d. malagas* along this stretch of coast. However, much effort would need to be expended in searching for them.

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