

Blue Mormon (*Papilio polymnestor parinda*)

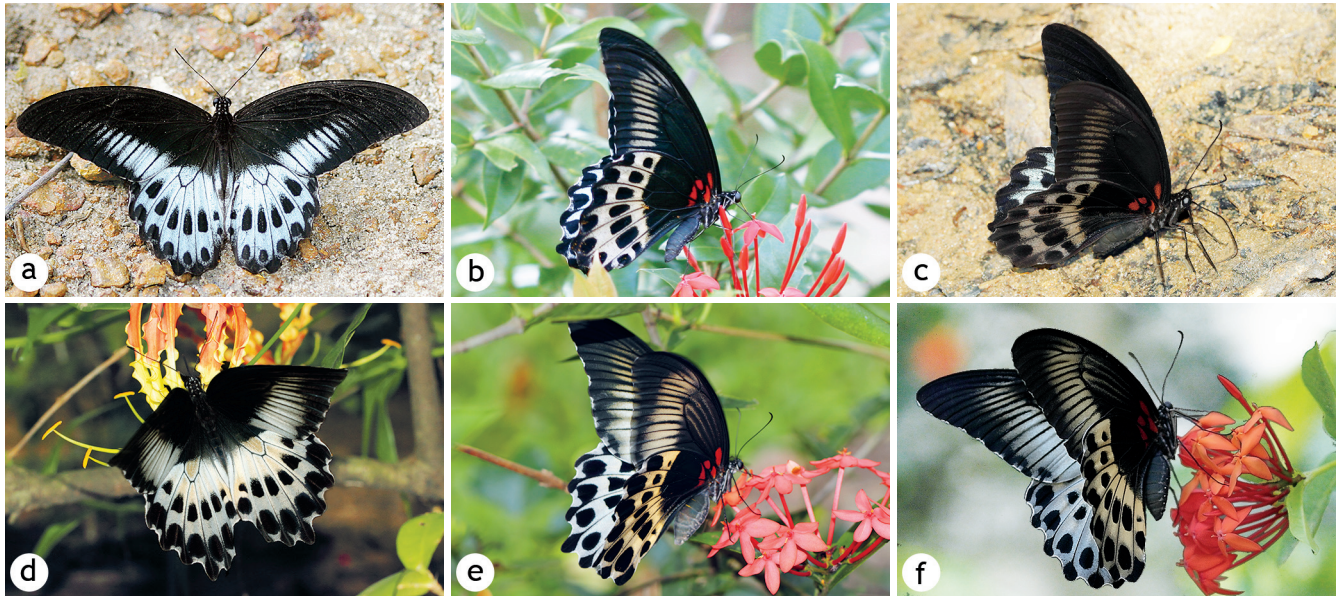


Fig. 8-14. Blue Mormon (*Papilio polymnestor parinda*). a) male, upperside; b) male feeding on nectar of *Ixora coccinea*, underside; c) male mudsipping, underside; d) female feeding on nectar of *Gloriosa superba*, upperside; e) - f) female, feeding on nectar of *Ixora coccinea*.

Wingspan: 115–150 mm

■ **Description (Fig. 8-14):** This large butterfly is a majestic sight as it swaggers through an open space or the dappled shade of a forest. It is the second-largest butterfly in the island. On the upperside, the female is a pale gray-blue with scattered diffuse beige scales; the smaller male is a shining light silvery-blue.

■ **Similar species:** None.

■ **Status, distribution and habitat:** This endemic subspecies is common (5) and widely distributed from sea level to the highest hills. It flies throughout the year in the wetter areas, but is less common and more seasonal in the drier areas. It is most abundant from March to May. It has established itself in home gardens where species of *Citrus* are common. A few individuals are occasionally encountered in urban areas. The best habitats, however, are forested areas that provide a fair degree of shade and undergrowth. Threat status: LC.

■ **Adult behavior:** Like the Red Helen, it is a patrolling species and routinely covers a large territory. It flies fast, swaying from side to side, frequently slowing or braking to change direction. It flies 1–3 m above the ground and is seldom seen in the canopy. Despite its fast flight, its wing beats appear slow and unhurried.

Its long proboscis allows it to access nectar from flowers with long corolla tubes such as those of *Clerodendrum paniculatum*, *Ixora coccinea* and *Mussaenda frondosa*. It is also fond of the older red-flowered cultivars of *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*. It does not visit small flowers unless they are part of a large inflorescence; these flowers likely offer too little nectar to be worth the effort, and do

not provide enough support on which to alight. In dry weather, the male mudsips on wet soil along roads and riverbeds. While doing so, it flaps its wings quickly over a small angle to keep its legs just touching the ground—a technique that allows it to get airborne quickly to flee from a threat. Of course, on occasion it may remain still for a fleeting few seconds for a photographer!

Courtship usually takes place in the afternoon in the forest understory or in a well-shaded area with the male hovering tirelessly near the female to show its vitality in order to entice the female to mate. We once observed a female refuse the advances of a male that had hovered continuously for more than 25 minutes. It is migratory.

■ **Immature stages:** The female lays its eggs singly, usually on the underside of a mature leaf; it prefers plants growing in moderate to dense shade in the understory. The larva feeds on the leaves of many species of plants belonging to the Rutaceae. In the wild, *Atalantia ceylanica*, *Atalantia monophylla* and *Paramignya monophylla* are widely used. In agricultural areas and home gardens, orange (*Citrus sinensis*) and pommelo (*Citrus grandis*), both large-leaved plants, are used more extensively than the small-leaved lime (*Citrus aurantiifolia*) and tangerine (*Citrus reticulata*). The choice of species with larger leaves would certainly allow a mature larva to be accommodated on a single leaf without space constraints. The larva resembles those of the Common Mormon and Red Helen, but can be distinguished from them by its larger size and bluish-green color. It pupates close to where it last fed on the underside of a twig. The pupa appears in shades of green or brown mixed with gray and is well-camouflaged against its background.