**Prepona laertes** (Lepidoptera: Nymphalidae), an exotic butterfly

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**INTRODUCTION:** Prepona laertes (Hübner) is a butterfly native to tropical South and Central America. In August 2013, USDA and FDACS-DPI detected a population of adults and larvae feeding on *Chrysobalanus icaco* L., cocoplum, in Broward County, Fla. (Hayden 2013). The infestation has persisted to the present in a localized area in Coconut Creek.

**IDENTIFICATION:** The butterflies are dorsally blue and ventrally brown (Figs. 1, 2). Females (not shown) are larger and lack the males’ yellow hind wing tufts. The eggs are laid singly on leaves in the shade and hatch in a week (Fig. 3). Older larvae (Fig. 4) have a cone-shaped head and a pair of tails, which are less pronounced in young larvae. The chrysalis (Fig. 5) is green, has two short horns and is suspended in foliage.

**HOSTS:** Larvae feed on foliage of trees mainly in Chrysobalanaceae and Fabaceae. In its native range, hosts include cocoplum and relatives; *Andira inermis* (W. Wright) Kunth ex DC., cabbagebark tree or angelin; *Inga* species; *Melicoccus bijugatus* Jacq., Spanish lime or genip (Beccaloni et al. 2008). Larvae chew the distal half of a leaf, leaving the midrib as a resting perch. Caterpillars of some other butterfly species cause similar damage to other trees, but only *P. laertes* feeds on cocoplum in this way. The few moth larvae that feed on cocoplum do not have conical heads. Beetles, such as the *Myllocerus undecimpustulatus undatus* (Marshall), Sri Lankan weevil, chew irregular holes in cocoplum leaves without constructing a perch.

**ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE:** In Florida, larvae have been observed feeding on wild cocoplum. The plant is a common hedgerow in South Florida, so the butterfly could become widely distributed.

**DETECTION:** Examination of specimens is necessary to confirm identification. Larvae are the life stage that is most likely to be found. To collect a specimen, place larvae in a vial of 70% isopropyl or ethyl alcohol with the damaged leaf. Net adult butterflies, immobilize by squeezing the body and place them in an envelope with packing to avoid crushing in transit. Submit specimens with collection data to FDACS-DPI Entomology, 1911 SW 34th St., Gainesville, FL 32608-1201.

**REFERENCES:**


Fig. 1. Male *Prepona laertes*, dorsal aspect. Scale bar = 1 cm. 
Photo credit: J.E. Hayden, DPI

Fig. 2. Male *Prepona laertes*, ventral aspect. Scale bar = 1 cm. 
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Fig. 3. Egg of *Prepona laertes*. Scale in mm. 
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Fig. 4. Third-stage of *Prepona laertes* larva on cocoplum leaf perch. 
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Fig. 5. *Prepona laertes* pupa. Scale in mm. 
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