

Cercyonis pegala incana

English name Common Wood-nymph, subspecies *incana*

Scientific name *Cercyonis pegala incana*

Family Nymphalidae (Brushfoots) **Subfamily** Satyrinae (Satyrs)

Other English names Common Woodnymph; Common Wood Nymph

Other scientific names none

Risk status

BC: imperilled (S2); red-listed; Conservation Framework Highest Priority – 2
(Goal 3, Maintain BC diversity)

Canada: COSEWIC – not assessed

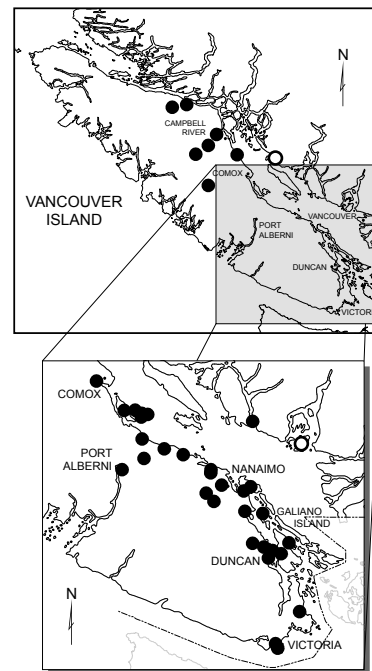
Global: apparently secure (G5T4T5)

Elsewhere: Washington & Oregon – not assessed

Range/Known distribution

Common Wood-nymph (subspecies *incana*) occurs west of the Cascade Mountains from Washington to southwestern British Columbia. The taxonomic relationships of this subspecies to populations in Oregon are uncertain, and several experts combine coastal populations in British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon into a single subspecies.

In Canada, Common Wood-nymph (subspecies *incana*) has been found on Vancouver Island, the Gulf Islands, and occasionally on the Sunshine Coast. According to historical records, prior to the 1980s, populations were restricted to areas north of Nanaimo. This species' range has expanded southwards in recent years, likely as a result of the creation of additional suitable habitat through logging and development. Populations are now known throughout southeastern and central Vancouver Island from Sayward south to Rocky Point. Individuals are only occasionally seen in the Victoria area and on the Saanich Peninsula.



Distribution of *Cercyonis pegala incana*

● Recently confirmed sites

○ Known historical sites

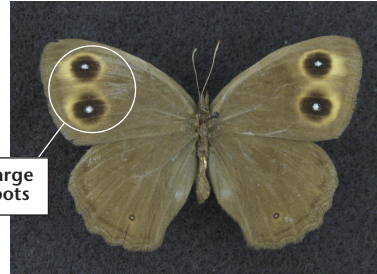


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Male, dorsal view



Female, dorsal view



Male, ventral view



ventral wing
surface lighter
brown on
outer half



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All photos: James Miskelly

Field description

Common Wood-nymph (subspecies *incana*) is a large, light-cocoa to dark chocolate brown butterfly with two large, well-defined, post-median (slightly outward from the middle of the wing) eyespots on the forewings. Eyespots are black surrounding a small white central dot. The eyespots of females are generally larger and have a more-defined yellow rim or halo. Eyespots are visible on both the dorsal and ventral surfaces of the wings, although they are typically more developed on the ventral surface. The **ventral hindwing is lighter on the outer half** and has a sub-marginal (set in from the wing edge) row of one to six smaller eyespots, more on males. Wingspan is approximately 5.0 cm and males and females are similarly-sized.

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

Common Wood-nymph (subspecies *incana*) is readily identified by its looping and erratic flight pattern, which is distinctive from other butterflies on the southern BC coast. Great Arctic, subspecies *gigas* (*Oeneis nevadensis gigas*) is more golden-brown in colour and has dark wing borders and white patches along the margins which produce a scalloped appearance to the wing edge. Ventral hindwings are also distinctly mottled grey and

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brown. They were historically known from southern areas of Vancouver Island near Victoria but are increasingly rare at low elevation sites. There are no other similar species in the area.

Immature stages: Larvae (caterpillars) for this subspecies are poorly described and the coloration of larvae in this genus is known to be geographically variable. They are possibly light-green with yellow longitudinal stripes, and covered in short hairs.

Life history

Populations of Common Wood-nymph (subspecies *incana*) in British Columbia have a single generation per year and fly from mid-July to early September. They nectar on a wide range of flowers, and on willow and poplar sap.

Larval host plants of this subspecies are almost certainly grasses. Host plants for other subspecies elsewhere include both introduced and native species of several broad-leaved grasses: *Andropogon*, *Avena*, *Tridens*, and *Stipa*. However, there are no host plant records in British Columbia.

Determination of larval host plants is difficult as females are known to deposit eggs haphazardly and will often drop their eggs in flight. As with other species in this genus, eggs are likely laid singly on blades of grass, making them difficult to detect, and it is not known whether native grasses are used exclusively in British Columbia, or if non-native grasses are suitable host plants. The recent range expansion on Vancouver Island may be related to host plant use. This species has six larval instar stages and is thought to overwinter as first instar larvae.

Habitat

Butterfly and skipper populations are very closely linked to the availability of larval foodplants and adult nectar sources. Common Wood-nymph (subspecies *incana*) can be found in grassy forest openings, woodlands, meadows, and streambanks, as well as anthropogenic habitats such as clearcuts, roadsides, weedy fields, and powerline rights-of-way. It is commonly, although not exclusively, associated with Garry Oak (*Quercus garryana*) meadows, oak and/or Douglas-fir woodlands, and dry coastal Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) forest containing native grasses.

Why this species is at risk

Natural grassy habitats in the range of this subspecies are continuing to disappear due to urban development. Forest fires and burning by First Nations historically would have maintained trees at lower densities and maintained grassy openings. However, fire suppression has allowed in-growth of shrubs and trees, reducing the amount of natural grassy habitat. Garry Oak ecosystems, dry coastal Douglas-fir forest, and even human-created habitats are being heavily impacted by the introduction of Scotch Broom* (*Cytisus scoparius*) and other invasive plants which outcompete

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native grasses. Even though clearcuts may provide suitable habitat at this time, these openings will gradually change from open habitats to closed-canopy forest, due either to natural succession or replanting, thus eliminating more of the open, grassy habitats this species needs. Vegetation management activities along roadsides, railways, and powerline rights-of-way, such as mowing or spraying of herbicides, also disturb suitable habitat and directly harm larvae. Other threats to this species are poorly known, but potential threats include habitat degradation from recreational use, intensive grazing, changes to site hydrology, impacts from Btk spray used to control Gypsy Moth infestations, and climate change.

What you can do to help this species

Management practices should be tailored to the needs of this species and its habitat. Potential management tools will depend on the specific circumstances and may require experimentation prior to implementation. **Before taking any action, expert advice should be obtained, and no action taken without it. Please refer to the introductory section of this manual.**

Protecting grassy areas in known habitats and ensuring these sites are not over-run with trees and shrubs will help to maintain healthy populations of Common Wood-nymph (subspecies *incana*) in Canada. Garry Oak ecosystems and open, dry Douglas-fir forest should be retained in a healthy, natural state. Limit recreation use of occupied sites, particularly use by ATVs. Alter the frequency and/or intensity of mowing or grazing to maintain open habitats while limiting impacts to larval foodplants and adult nectar sources. Avoid the use of pesticides.

If you see this species, **DO NOT CAPTURE** it, but take clear photographs if possible and record other pertinent information. Detailed information should be given to the BC Conservation Data Centre (www.env.gov.bc.ca/cdc).

References

Guppy, C.S. and J.H. Shepard. 2001. Butterflies of British Columbia. UBC Press, Vancouver, British Columbia in collaboration with the Royal British Columbia Museum.

Miskelly, J.W. 2011. Personal communication. Entomologist, Victoria, BC.

Pyle, R.M. 2002. The Butterflies of Cascadia. Seattle Audubon Society, Seattle, WA.

For further information, contact the Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team, or see the web site at: www.goert.ca.

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*Refers to non-native species.

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