

# Kahukura and Ongaonga

## Protect New Zealand Red Admiral Butterflies By Planting Native Tree Nettle



**Kahukura** (“red cloak”)/Red Admiral Butterfly (*Vanessa gonerilla*) is named for its striking red wings. *V. gonerilla gonerilla* and *V. gonerilla ida* are endemic to mainland New Zealand and the Chatham Islands, respectively.



**Kahukōwhai** (“yellow cloak”)/Yellow Admiral Butterfly (*V. itea*) is native to New Zealand, but can also be found in Australia.



**Ongaonga** (“aversion”) is the Māori name commonly associated with Tree Nettle (*Urtica ferox*), but can be used for Chatham Island (*U. australis*) and Dwarf Bush (*U. urens*) nettle.

### Kahukura

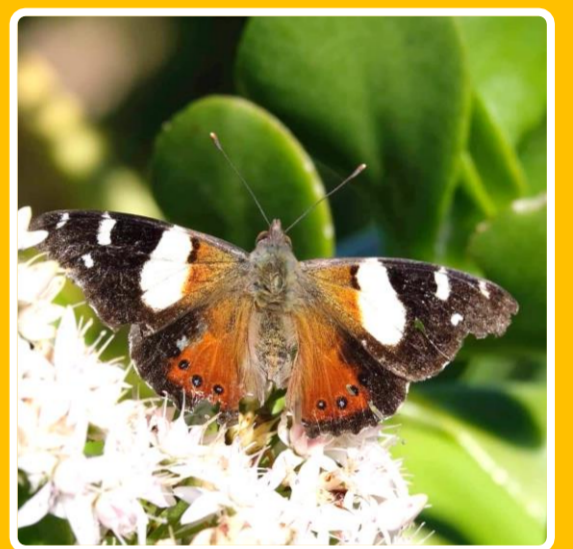


Kahukura and Kahukōwhai rely on nettle for protection and caterpillar development.



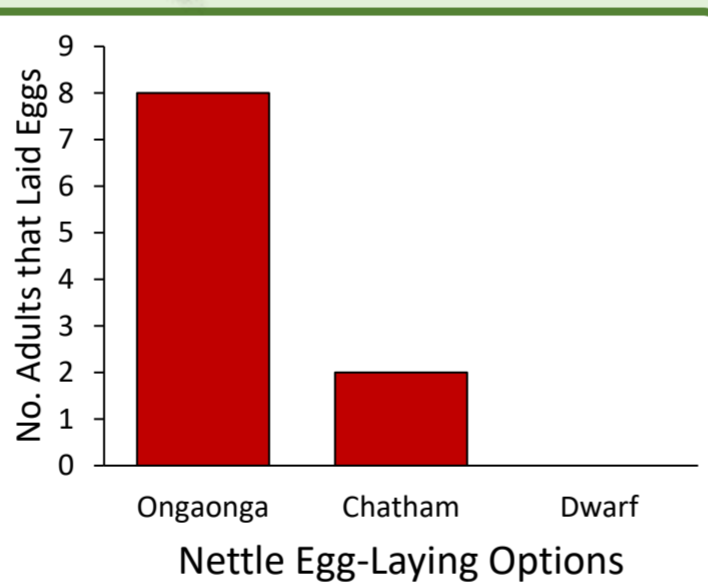
Once common throughout New Zealand, populations of Kahukura and Kahukōwhai have declined due to pesticides and removal of their host stinging nettle plants.

### Kahukōwhai

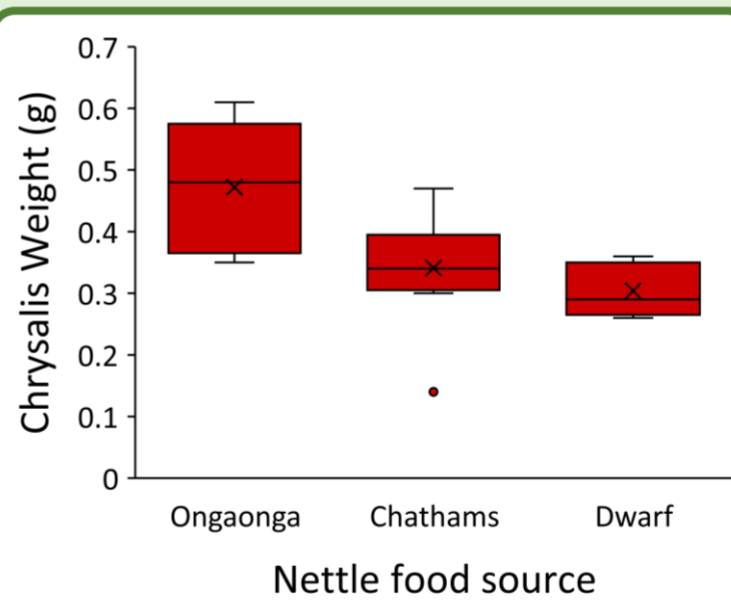


**NZ Native Nettle**  
Ongaonga, Tree  
Southern/Chatham Island\*  
Sykes's Bush\*  
*Urtica aspera*

\*You can buy Sykes's Bush & Chatham Island Nettle seed from Moths & Butterflies Trust NZ Pūrerehua Aotearoa ([nzbutterflies.org.nz](http://nzbutterflies.org.nz))!



When given a choice, Kahukura are more likely to lay eggs on Ongaonga or Southern/Chatham Island Nettle; none laid eggs on Dwarf Nettle. Sanger 2022, Unpublished Data.



When raised on different nettle plants, Kahukura that were fed Ongaonga leaves grew the largest, followed by those raised on Southern/Chatham Island Nettle. Sanger 2022, Unpublished Data.



**NZ Introduced Nettle**  
Dwarf Bush Nettle  
Scrub Nettle  
*Urtica dioica*

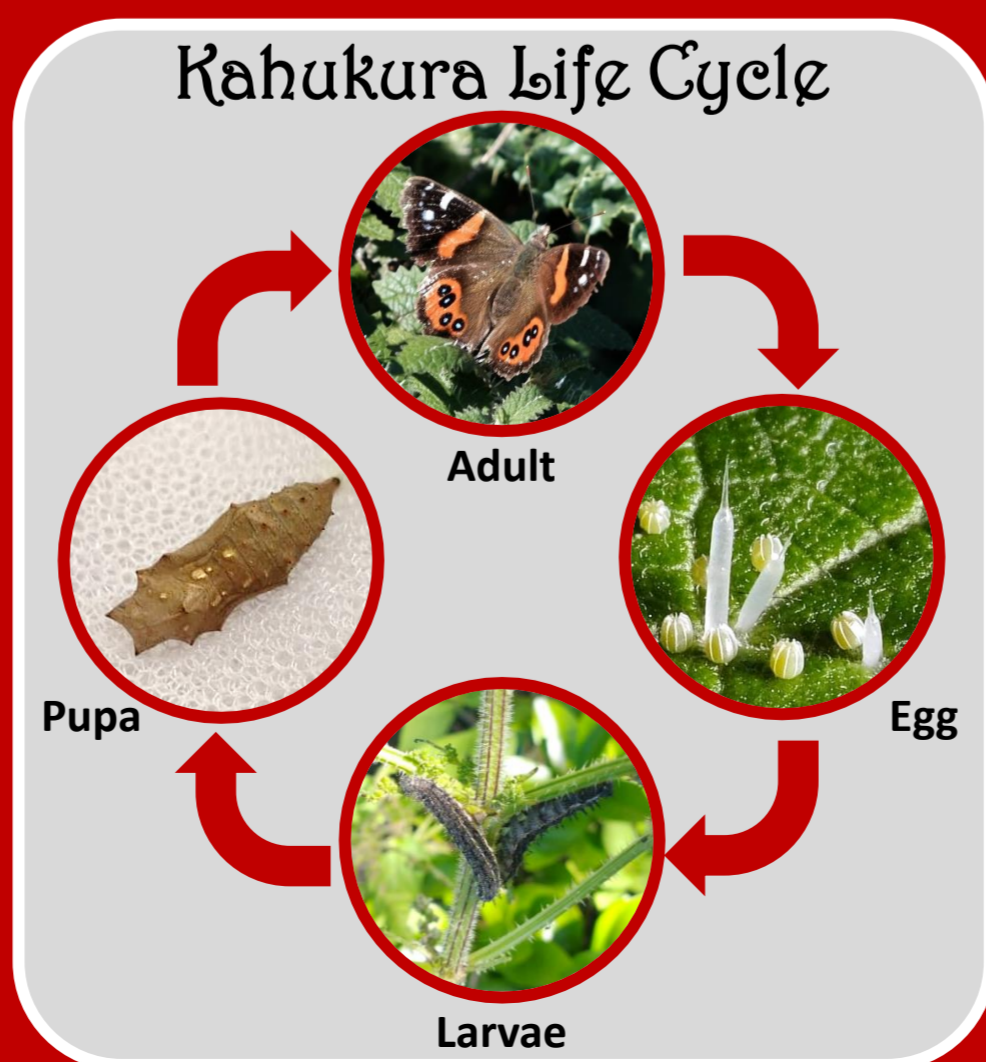
Kahukōwhai larvae can develop on introduced nettles too!

Nettles are the **ONLY** host plant for Kahukura and Kahukōwhai.



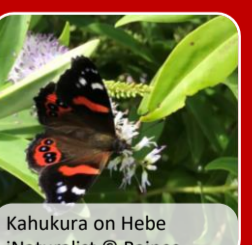
Stinging needles protect eggs, larvae and pupae from predators. Caterpillars produce silk to pull the leaves and form a tent around them, using the needles as extra protection.

Admirals also sequester toxins from nettle to make themselves distasteful to predators.



### What Can You Do?

- Plant native nettle
- Put a fence around nettle to reduce the chance of stings.
- **Plant a pollinator garden.** Avoid pesticides, add perennial flowers (like Hebe), and leave the “weeds” (like, ragwort).



Kahukura on Hebe  
iNaturalist © Baines



Kahukōwhai on ragwort  
iNaturalist © Jandt

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