

Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall...

Explanatory note: I am sometimes asked what I think is New Zealand's fairest moth of all. Or, to be more precise, I wish someone would be kind enough to ask me what I consider to be the most beautiful moth in New Zealand. In case no-one ever does, I'm telling you now that it is *Nymphostola galactina*. This delicate and dreamlike creature used to belong to the family Oecophoridae, but later switched allegiances to Depressariidae, then flirted with Hypertrophidae before settling for Elachistidae in the broadest possible sense. Its classification is not the only source of indecision. How should one pronounce *galactina* (which, by the way, means 'milky')? Should it rhyme with 'cleaner', 'meaner' and 'Christina', or with 'winer', 'diner' and 'Indian mynah'? While the moth is making up its mind, its poor larvae, which live (almost invisibly to the human eye) beneath a fine silk web on the upperside of *Griselinia*, *Pittosporum* and *Lophomyrtus* leaves, are under attack by introduced wasps, which can see through the thin veil of their disguise. Hence the moth is now commonest at higher altitudes where these pestilential predators are less abundant. And what a moth! The pearly, almost translucent whiteness of its wings and body are subtly and softly tinged here and there with an evanescent emerald hue, giving it a ghostly greenish gorgeousness unmatched by even the most perfect plump puriri moth.

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank, and seek the posthumous forgiveness of, William Shakespeare, whose play *Antony and Cleopatra* provided the inspiration for some of these lines. Some details of the story have been compressed at the author's whim.

Who could be greener, paler, finer
Than *Nymphostola galactina*?
We'll see its equal just as soon
As moss is grown upon the moon
Or when they take a spinach dhal
And lightly coat the Taj Mahal—
Others have tried to imitate
And met a most invidious fate...

Desiring to be smooth as silk
Fair Cleopatra bathed in milk;
The olive-skinned Egyptian Queen

Soon turned a whiter shade of green;
Mark Antony was so impressed
He almost instantly undressed
(That sweet romantic Roman boy)
And joined her there in lactic joy.

'Twas war, alas, that came to blight
Their calcium-enriched delight—
The cream of asses, goats or cattle
May help in love, but not in battle—
And so the dashing bathtime teaser
Was beaten by Octavius Caesar,
And in a fit of wounded pride
Ran straight into a sword and died.

Poor Cleopatra was distressed:
She clasped a viper to her breast
(Knowing that those who do so tend
To earn an asp-assisted end).
They say that as she felt it bite,
She went a turquoise shade of white...
But *still* she wasn't paler, greener
Than *Nymphostola galactina*.

