ZOOLOGIE

Roger Casement's Butterflies at the National Museum of Ireland – Natural History, Dublin, Ireland

Les papillons de Roger Casement au Musée national d'Irlande – Histoire naturelle, Dublin, Irlande

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Summary: Roger David Casement's multifaceted legacy transcends his well-documented roles in diplomacy and political activism, revealing significant contributions to the field of natural history. While notable for his exposure of the exploitation faced by indigenous communities in Africa and South America, Casement's work as a naturalist is equally compelling. As a British consul, he meticulously gathered cultural artifacts and samples of local flora and fauna, establishing relationships with leading contemporaneous scientists. Under the guise of naturalism, and utilizing the tools of an entomologist, he scrutinized the egregious actions of the Peruvian Amazon Rubber Company while meticulously documenting the region's biodiversity. Among his findings was a collection of butterflies from the Igaraparana forest in Putumayo, of which only six specimens seem to exist currently. This collection is presented and serves as a lasting testament to Casement's dual commitment as both a humanitarian advocate and a passionate naturalist, intertwining social justice with scientific pursuits.

KEY-WORDS

Roger David Casement
history
Lepidoptera
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Résumé : L'héritage varié de Roger David Casement transcende ses rôles, bien documentés, qu'il a occupés dans la diplomatie et l'activisme politique, révélant des contributions significatives dans le domaine de l'histoire naturelle. S'il est surtout connu pour sa dénonciation de l'exploitation des communautés indigènes en Afrique et en Amérique du Sud, le travail de Casement en tant que naturaliste est tout aussi fascinant. En tant que consul britannique, il a méticuleusement rassemblé des artefacts culturels et des échantillons de la flore et de la faune locales, établissant des relations avec des scientifiques contemporains de premier plan. Sous le couvert du naturalisme et en utilisant les outils de l'entomologiste, il a suivi de près les exactions de la Peruvian Amazon Rubber Company tout en documentant méticuleusement la biodiversité de la région. Il a notamment rassemblé une collection de papillons de la forêt d'Igaraparaná, dans le Putumayo, dont il ne semble exister que six spécimens à l'heure actuelle. Cette collection est présentée et sert de testament durable au double engagement de Casement en tant qu'avocat humanitaire et naturaliste passionné, mêlant justice sociale et recherche scientifique.

MOTS-CLÉS

Roger David Casement
histoire
Lepidoptera
Rhopalocera
inventaire
Muséum national d'Irlande
Dublin

Resumen : El legado multifacético de Roger David Casement trasciende sus bien documentadas funciones en la diplomacia y el activismo político, revelando importantes contribuciones en el campo de la historia natural. Aunque es notable por haber sacado a la luz la explotación a la que fueron sometidas algunas comunidades indígenas de África y Sudamérica, la labor de Casement como naturalista es igualmente fascinante. Como cónsul británico, recopiló meticulosamente artefactos culturales y muestras de la flora y fauna locales, estableciendo relaciones con destacados científicos de la época. Bajo la apariencia del naturalismo y utilizando las herramientas de un entomólogo, examinó las atroces acciones de la Compañía Peruana del Caucho Amazónico, al tiempo que documentaba meticulosamente la biodiversidad de la región. Entre sus hallazgos se encuentra una colección de mariposas obtenidas en el bosque de Igaraparaná, en Putumayo, de la que actualmente solo parecen existir seis ejemplares. Esta colección se presenta y sirve como testimonio del doble compromiso de Casement como defensor humanitario y naturalista apasionado, entrelazando la justicia social con la búsqueda científica.

Palabras Claves

Roger David Casement
historia
Lepidoptera
Rhopalocera
inventario
Museo Nacional de Irlanda
Dublín

Introduction

Roger David Casement (*Ruairí Dáithí Mac Easmainn*; 1864–1916) was a diplomat and an Irish revolutionary executed for high treason in 1916 by the United Kingdom (Ó Síocháin, 2008). Today, Casement is mainly remembered for his investigations into the exploitation of indigenous peoples in colonial Africa and South America. However, Casement could also be defined as a naturalist, based on his collecting of zoological and botanical specimens. Casement's botanical and ethnocultural collections have been examined by Scannell and Snoddy (1968), Wylie (2010), Hart (2017), and O'Hanlon and Mitchell *(submitted).* The latter researchers recently catalogued the full extent of his zoological collections, as well as his links with prominent naturalists in Ireland and Britain during the early 20th Century. Casement's interest in, and collection of, natural history specimens was in many ways typical of a Victorian traveler. Less typical was that Casement employed this stereotype as a form of "entomological espionage," which serves as the basis for the present paper.

Roger Casement initiated his consular career in Africa in 1895, concluding his engagements on the continent by 1904. His thorough investigations into the brutal abuses perpetrated by the rubber industry under King Leopold II of Belgium exposed the horrific treatment of the native population in the so-called Congo Free State. His work in Africa culminated with the well-known Congo Report of 1904, which ultimately forced King Leopold II to sell his private fiefdom to the Belgian government (Hochschild, 1999; Ó Síocháin, 2008; Mitchell, 2013).

In 1906, Casement was assigned consular duties in Brazil and later in Perú. In 1910, he was instructed to investigate reports of atrocities occurring in rubber plantations in the remote Putumayo region, located in the Colombian Amazon, which was "more or less officially" under the control of Perú (Inglis, 1973; CAAAP, 2012; Mitchell, 2023; Gerardo Lamas, *personal communication*).

Casement's detailed investigations culminated in two significant reports that documented the abuses of the Peruvian Amazon Company, which was responsible for rubber extraction in the area (Casement, 1997; CAAAP, 2012; Mitchell, 2023). Casement's diaries from the Amazon are filled with details of wildlife encounters, including parrots, toucans, monkeys, capybaras, ocelots, ring-tailed coatis, turtles, alligators, and many others (Casement, 1997). It is clear from these diaries that Casement was captivated by animals; regularly taking them as pets on his journeys along the Amazon River. Casement seems to have had a particular fondness for butterflies. In his writings, Casement more often refers to the artistic quality of butterflies, rather than using scientific terminology. For example, wings are described using adjectives that would better describe a painting ("yellow ochre and burnt sienna" or "magnificent crimson" or "scarlet and black barred") instead of technical entomological language (Casement, 1997).

It is also noteworthy that Casement was familiar with the works of famous biologists Alfred Russell Wallace, Henry Walter Bates, and Richard Spruce, and brought copies of their books about their Amazonian travels with him. Casement's collecting was likely informed by the works of these pioneering naturalists, and it is fitting that Casement's small butterfly collection now shares space in the National Museum of Ireland with some of Wallace and Bates' own Lepidoptera specimens.

Uniquely, Casement used butterfly collecting as a form of entomological espionage. Disguised as a naturalist and even carrying a net and some other entomological tools, Casement collected butterfly specimens while gathering the information that would fill his reports (Casement, 1997; O'Hanlon & Mitchell, *submitted).* Butterfly collecting was used as a cover for investigating humanitarian abuses, as per Casement's diary entry on 3 October 1910:

> "*We play a part the whole day, and when investigating (as far as we can) a most appalling crime like that told this morning, pretend to be butterfly catching*" (Casement, 1997: 162).

Back in Ireland the following year, Casement would present ten butterflies "…from the forests between the Igaraparana and the Japura River" to the National Museum of Science and Art (today National Museum of Ireland – Natural History). It appears that only six of those specimens survive, and these are fully identified and presented herein for the first time.

Material and methods

Roger Casement's butterflies preserved in the Natural History collections of the National Museum of Ireland have been revised, studied, and photographed. Information for each taxon includes original name, author, year, and sex. Their current name is followed by a synonymic list and the type locality for each, providing a general idea of the distribution of each species. Collecting information and labels included with each specimen are indicated by a slash "/". A semi-colon ";" separates the set of labels from one specimen to the next. Any additional information is included in brackets where relevant. Dorsal and ventral views of every specimen, as well as their attached labels, are also figured (**Plates 1 & 2**).

Below are some general observations on each species and subspecies, followed by insights into their habits and preferred plant hosts. The taxa are organized alphabetically by genus, species, and subspecies, following the classification established by Lamas (2004) and Blandin (2007a, 2007b).

All images were taken using a Nikon D3000 camera.

The details of each publication related to the species are discussed in the References section.

Butterfly specimens donated by Roger Casement to the entomological collection of the NMI-NH

Historis odius dious Lamas, 1995
(Male, figs. 1A, 1B)

Historis odius dious Lamas, 1995 (repl. *Papilio danae* Cramer, [1775])

Papilio danae Cramer, [1775] (preocc. Fabricius, 1775); Surinam

Collecting information: ♂, "Igaraparana Forest 1910" [Putumayo, Colombia; the Igara Paraná forest is located along the Igara Paraná River, which is a tributary of the Putumayo River in Colombia. The Putumayo region is known for its dense Amazonian rainforest.], "NMINH: 1911.248.1 Sir R. Casement", "Historis odious AOH Det. 2024".

General comments: Widespread and common throughout its geographical range, the species *H. odius* (Fabricius, 1775) is distributed from Southern USA (occasionally found in southern Texas and Arizona), throughout Central and South America, and some Caribbean islands (Álvarez-Sierra & Álvarez-Corral, 1984; DeVries, 1987; Neild, 1996). Three subspecies are known, the nominal *odius* (Fabricius, 1775) from the Greater Antilles, and *caloucera* Brévignon, 2003, from the Windward and Leeward Islands, in Guadeloupe. The third ssp. *dious* Lamas, 1995, is distributed in the remaining of its geographical range.

Comments on Habits and foodplants: Adults can be seen near human dwellings feeding on filth and rotten fruits, and vegetables. They spend a good deal of time in the forest canopy feeding on ripe and rotten fruits. Several species of Cecropiaceae (*Cecropia insignis*, *C. obtusifolia*, *C. peltata*, *C. obtusa*, *Cecropia* sp.) have been reported as larval foodplants

(Enrico & Pinchon; 1969, Barcant, 1970; Alvarez -Sierra & Alvarez-Corral, 1984; Constantino, 1997, 1998; Wetherbee, 1991; Beccaloni *et al.*, 2008, Janzen & Hallwachs 2009; Gernaat *et al.* 2016). Plants in the Bignoniaceae *(Tabebuia* sp.) and Leguminosae (*Inga vera*) had also been mentioned as hosts (Scott, 1986; Beccaloni *et al*., 2008).

Morpho menelaus occidentalis C. Felder & R. Felder, 1862
(Female, figs. 2A, 2B; Males, figs. 2C – 2F)

Morpho menelaus var. *occidentalis* C. & R. Felder, 1862; [= Peru, San Martin]

Morpho melacheilus Staudinger, [1886]; [Brazil, Amazonas]

Morpho menelaus ornata Fruhstorfer, 1913; "Brazil, São Paulo"

Morpho paris Le Cerf, 1926; "French Guiana"

Morpho menelaus niger Weber, 1951; Colombia

Morpho menelaus offenbachi Bryk, 1953; Brazil, Amazonas

Morpho menelaus prätorii Fischer, 1962; Brazil, Amazonas

Morpho (Grasseia) melacheilus canelosana Le Moult & Réal, 1962; Ecuador, "Canelos et Balzapampa"

Morpho (Grasseia) melacheilus juruensis Le Moult & Réal, 1962; Brazil, Amazonas

Morpho (Grasseia) melacheilus juruensis f. *puruensis* Le Moult & Réal, 1962; Brazil, Amazonas

Morpho (Grasseia) melacheilus melacheilus f. *nigrocincta* Le Moult & Réal, 1962; Perú

Morpho (Grasseia) melacheilus melacheilus f. *sanguicincta* Le Moult & Réal, 1962; Brazil, Amazonas

Morpho (Grasseia) melacheilus melacheilus f. *violaceocincta* Le Moult & Réal, 1962; Brazil, Amazonas

Morpho (Grasseia) melacheilus orientis Le Moult & Réal, 1962; Brazil, Amazonas

Morpho (Grasseia) menelaus f. *arcufera* Le Moult & Réal, 1962; [Brazil, Amazonas]

Morpho (Grasseia) menelaus guyanensis f. *punctata* Le Moult & Réal, 1962; "French Guiana"

Morpho menelaus amseli Weber, 1963; Brazil, Amazonas

Collecting information: ♀, "Igaraparana Forest 248 1911" [Putumayo, Colombia]", "NMINH: 1911.248.2 Sir R. Casement", Morpho achilles ♀ AOH Det. 2024"; ♂, "Igaraparana Forest 248 1911" [Putumayo, Colombia]", "NMINH: 1911.248.4 Sir R. Casement", "Morpho menelaus AOH Det. 2024"; ♂, "Igaraparana Forest 248 1911" [Putumayo, Colombia]", "NMINH: 1911.248.5 Sir R. Casement", "Morpho menelaus AOH Det. 2024"

General comments: *Morpho menelaus* (Linnaeus, 1758), the blue morpho, is perhaps the most common species in the genus, and it is distributed along many habitats throughout Central and South America (Álvarez-Sierra & Álvarez-Corral, 1984; DeVries, 1987; Neild, 2008; Blandin *et al*., 2020; Murillo-Hiller, 2025). This particular subspecies (*M. m. occidentalis*) seems to be widely distributed along the rainforests of South America throughout the Amazonian and the Andean regions, extending from Brazil, Bolivia, Perú, Ecuador, and southern Colombia (Le Moult & Réal, 1962; Blandin, 2007a, 2007b; Blandin & Purser, 2013).

Comments on Habits and foodplants: This subspecies boast wings that are largely coated with scales, which create a striking blue appearance through their physical properties. Observations have shown that these butterflies display a clear pattern in their flying habits. Males tend to be most active between 6 and 9 AM on sunny days, often steering clear of direct sunlight. On the other hand, females possess fewer blue-reflective scales and seem to prefer lingering around their larval host plants (Renoux, 2011). Its caterpillars seem to have a diverse diet, with a strong affinity for plants from the Fabaceae family, as well as those from the Erythroxylaceae family (Vasquez Bardales *et al.*, 2017). They have been notably spotted on species from both *Dalbergia* and *Erythroxylum.*

Morpho helenor theodorus Fruhstorfer, 1907
(Male, figs. 1C, 1D)

Morpho achilles theodorus Fruhstorfer, 1907; Brazil, Amazonas

Morpho achilles theodorus f. *micans* Fruhstorfer, 1907; Brazil, Amazonas

Morpho achilles michaeli Röber, 1929; Peru

Morpho achilles adelaide Weber, 1944; Bolivia

Morpho achilles roqueensis Bryk, 1953; Peru

Morpho helenor michaeli f. *hannemanni* Le Moult & Réal, 1962; Peru

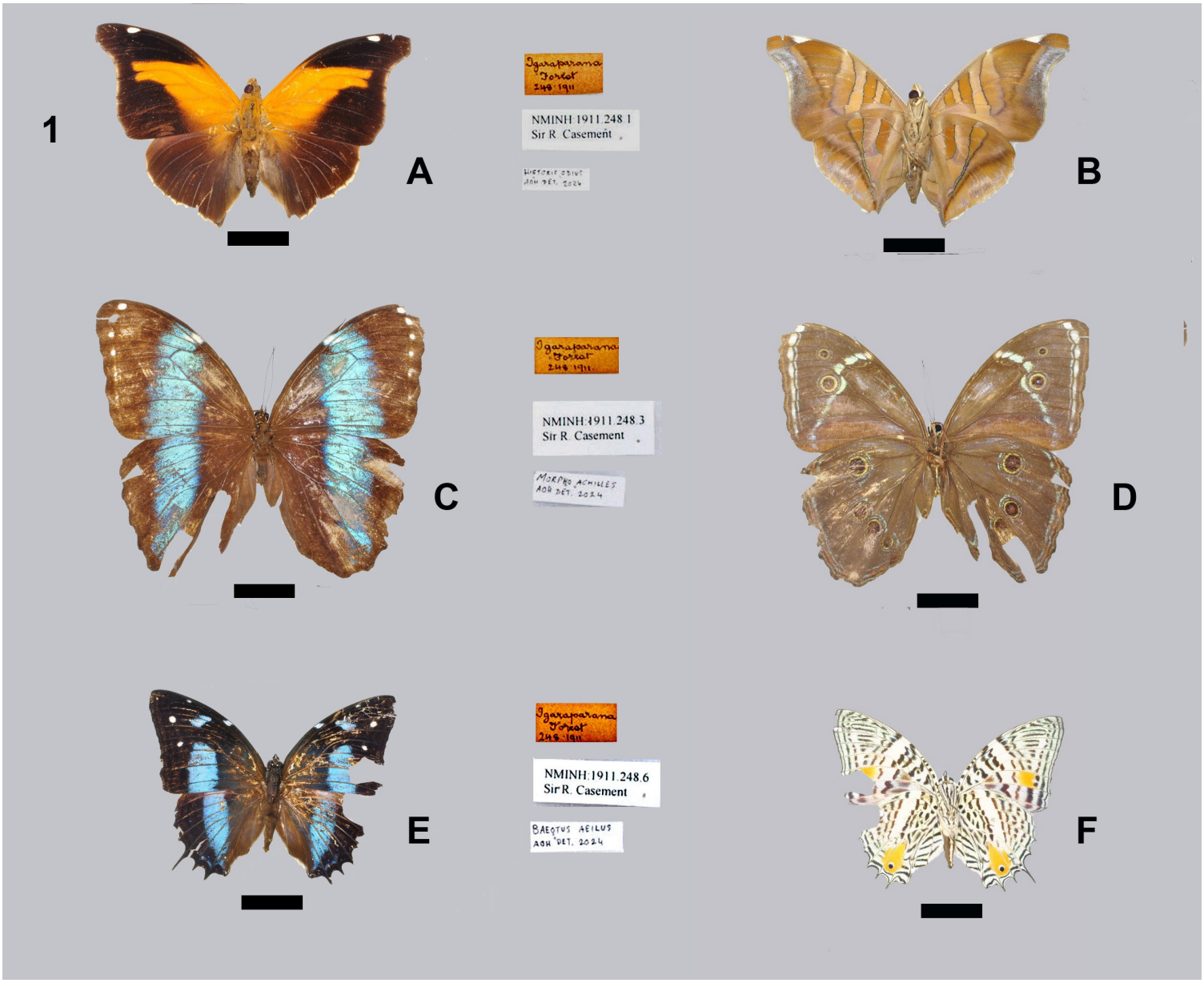

Plate 1. Figs. **A & B.** ♂, *Historis odius dious*; Figs. **C & D.** ♂, *Morpho helenor theodorus*; Figs. **E & F.** ♂, *Baeotus aeilus*. All from Igaraparaná Forest, Putumayo, Colombia. Roger Casement, collector. National Museum of Ireland—Natural History, Dublin, Ireland.

Morpho helenor albertii Le Moult & Réal, 1962; Peru

Morpho helenor albertii f. *indecisa* Le Moult & Réal, 1962; Peru

Morpho helenor basquini Le Moult & Réal, 1962; Brazil, Amazonas

Morpho helenor maloensis Le Moult & Réal, 1962; Ecuador

Morpho helenor conquistador Le Moult & Réal, 1962; Ecuador

Morpho helenor felipensis Le Moult & Réal, 1962; Brazil, Amazonas

Morpho leontius peripherica Le Moult & Réal, 1962; Peru

Collecting information: ♂, “Igaraparana Forest 248 1911” [Putumayo, Colombia]”, “NMINH: 1911.248.3 Sir R. Casement”, *Morpho achilles* AOH Det. 2024” General comments: Morpho helenor (Cramer, 1776) is widely distributed from Mexico and throughout Central to South America. It is considered a species group and more than one species might be involved in it (Le Moult & Réal, 1962). They usually soar near the forest's understory and seldom touch the ground, doing so only occasionally to sip liquids from decayed fruits. About 30 subspecies have been described so far. Among them, we find this one from the Putumayo region. *Morpho helenor theodorus* is distributed in central and western Amazon, including the state of Amazonas in Venezuela, the southern departments of Colombia (including Putumayo), Oriente in Ecuador, and northern departments of Peru (Blandin, 2007a, 2007b). Blandin

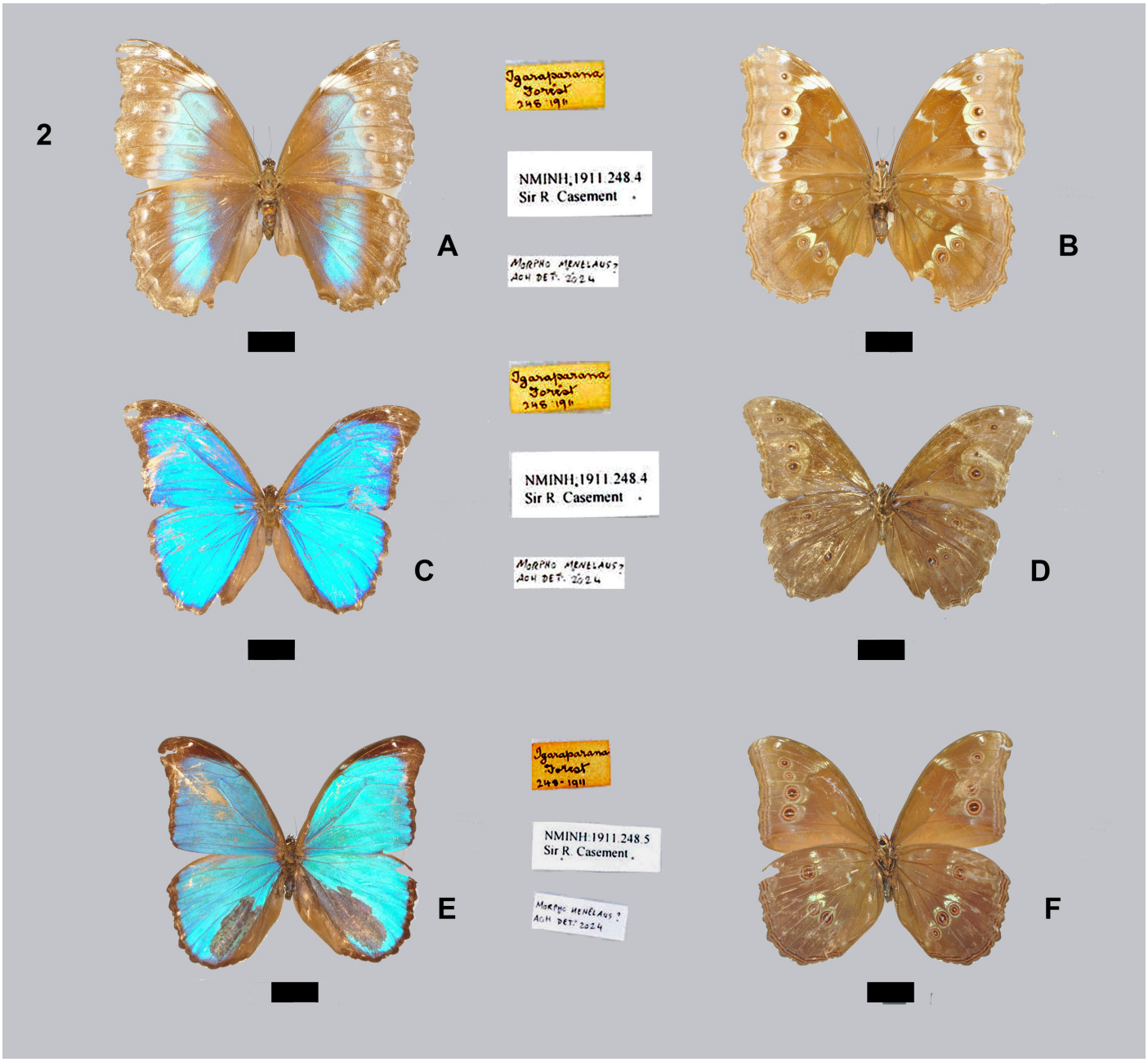

Plate 2. Figs. **A & B.** ♀, figs. **C—F.** ♂♂, *Morpho menelaus occidentalis*. All from Igaraparaná Forest, Putumayo, Colombia. Roger Casement, collector. National Museum of Ireland—Natural History, Dublin, Ireland.

(2007a) mentions that in the periphery of the Amazon plains, mainly in the Andean piedmont, this subspecies hybridized naturally with other *Morpho* species and subspecies of *M. helenor*.

Comments on Habits and foodplants: primarily feeds on host plants from the Leguminosae (Fabaceae) family, such as *Canavalia, Vigna, Wisteria, Trifolium* (Clover), *Arachis* (Peanut), and *Robinia pseudacacia* (False Acacia) (Vásquez Bardales *et al*., 2017). Other plants they may feed on include *Dalbergia, Lonchocarpus, Mucuna, Platymiscium,* and *Pterocarpus.*

***Baeotus aeilus* (Stoll, 1780)** (Male, figs. 1E, 1F)

Papilio aeilus Stoll, 1780; "Amboina"

Eriboea aile Hübner, [1819]; (emend.) *Megistanis amazonicus* Riley, 1919; Brazil, Amazonas, Manicore

Collecting information: ♂, "Igaraparana Forest 248 1911" [Putumayo, Colombia]", "NMINH: 1911.248.6 Sir R. Casement", Baetus aeilus AOH Det. 2024"

General comments: This species is often referred to as the "Amazon beauty" and it is native to the upper Amazon regions spanning Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia, Perú, and Bolivia

(Riley 1919). Adults are sexually dimorphic and are known for their swift flight. Like other species in the genus, they primarily feed on ripe fruits (DeVries, 1987). Four species belong to the genus *Baeotus* (D'Abrera, 1984; Lamas, 2004). Their life cycle has yet to be determined (van den Berghe *et al*., 2016; Lalonde, 2021).

It bears a striking resemblance to *B. baeotus* (Doubleday, 1849), which ranges from South-eastern Mexico through Central and South America. However, there are notable differences between the two: the Amazon beauty tends to be smaller, with the front end of the blue band on the forewings more smoothly rounded, and the blue band on the hindwings appearing narrower. Also, Riley (1919) mentions that on its underside, the general ground color is pale green, where most black markings are blended with a greenish hue, while in *B. baeotus*, these are brownish. The black patterns of the Amazon beauty are well defined; the pale bands in the transverse discal area are broader and particularly sharper toward the outer edges. Additionally, there's a consistent distinction in the black markings within the hindwing cell, as these markings are longer and narrower, often forming elongated diagonal lines (Riley, 1919).

Comments on Habits and foodplants: Given the close evolutionary relationship they appear to share with the genus *Historis*, some researchers suggest that Moraceae and Urticaceae could potentially serve as their food sources (van den Berghe *et al*., 2016; Lalonde, 2021).

Conclusion

Although he is best remembered as a humanitarian and revolutionary nationalist, Roger Casement was also an amateur naturalist who made small but important contributions to Irish natural history collections. Among the many ethnographic and natural history specimens he donated to various Irish institutions, a selection of stunning Nymphalidae can still be found in the entomological collection of the National Museum of Ireland. Despite the observable damage to the specimens (see **plates 1 & 2**), their coloration, intricate patterns, and aesthetic appeal continue to engage and attract both enthusiasts and researchers who examine and analyze them. While his butterfly collection may lack significant scientific value, it serves as a powerful and unique lens through which we can explore and understand the complex legacies of imperialism, exploration, scientific discovery, extractive capitalism, decolonization, cultural nationalism, and humanitarian activism all at once.

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