



Red admiral rescue

By Jacqui Simpson and Liesbeth Turner-Visser

Kahukura – red admirals – are the best known of our 17 native butterflies, but their numbers are dropping. They live only where there are stinging nettles for their caterpillars to eat. Sadly, over the years, people have tried to get rid of nettles, seeing them as weeds.

Grow nettles

Nettles thrive in damp areas in gardens and on farms. How about growing some? You can buy native nettle seeds from www.monarch.org.nz



Save ongaonga

Native ongaonga – tree nettle – has a dangerous sting. Stay away from wild ongaonga, but make sure no one gets rid of it. It's a red admiral favourite.

Grow flowers that attract butterflies

Red admirals feed on nectar from flowers and tree sap. They love lots of colourful flowers – blue, pink and purple.



Make a breeding shelter

Red admiral caterpillars wrap nettle leaves around themselves to make tents, and do tiny black poos. If you find eggs or caterpillars on nettles, make a shelter over them to keep out wasps, birds and other predators.

Use anything – perhaps a plastic plant frame, covered in an old net curtain, or a mesh toy box. Make sure your caterpillars have plenty of nettles inside. They'll climb up and hang from the top when they become chrysalides.

When the butterflies are flapping, let them go.



Photo: Jacqui Simpson
Illustrations: Liesbeth Visser

Make a butterfly feeder

1 Make sugar syrup: one part sugar and nine parts water. Bring to the boil. Cool.

2 Cut a kitchen sponge into pieces, dip in syrup, and place on a saucer.



3 Add flat stones for butterflies to rest on, and sand.

4 Place near flowers. Add syrup as needed, to keep the sponge moist.

5 Watch, and see what butterflies land.