In memoriam: Rafael Fernando Rey Cárdenas 1958-2010

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On the 22nd May 2010 the talented Venezuelan Lepidopterist Rafael Fernando Rey Cárdenas died in San Cristóbal, Táchira state, of a heart attack at the tragically young age of 51.

Fernando, as he preferred to be known, was born in Caracas on 10th December 1958 to Colombian parents of Spanish and Italian descent (José Alberto de Jesús Rey Cubillos and Mery Cardenas de Rey). He was the youngest of four children, with a sister and two brothers (Lucía, Luís Alberto, and Ricardo José), and also had several half brothers and sisters. He went to school initially in San Cristóbal, but spent most of his youth in Bogota, Colombia, where he graduated from secondary school in 1978, having studied at both San Juan Bautista de la Salle and Colegio San Juan Eudes. Subsequently he returned to San Cristóbal, spending most of the remainder of his life there or in neighbouring towns within Táchira state.



Figure 1. Fernando was amused by the persistence of this male Neographium agesilaus which spent a long time "puddling" on his shirt. This photo was taken in September 1997 at one of his favourite sites, along the Río Frío, in the SE of the Sierra de El Tamá, Táchira, Venezuela.

Fernando was passionate about butterflies from his early childhood. Although he collected all butterfly groups throughout his life, he specialised in Pieridae, and concentrated most of his time and effort collecting and studying the Venezuelan species, correctly considering that this family was relatively neglected by collectors in Venezuela, and hoping that his research work would provide important contributions to our knowledge of the butterfly fauna of his homeland. His discoveries proved him right.

Over the course of many years he sampled a tiny forest he found on the outskirts of San Cristobal, called Hacienda Pánaga (Chucurí), at around 650-750 m elevation, which is possibly the single most species-diverse site that has been sampled for butterflies in Venezuela (pers. obs.). Fernando compiled a checklist of the Pieridae of Hacienda Pánaga which, although never published, was made available on his web site. Fernando later created a report and annotated checklist of the Pieridae of Táchira state (Rey, 1994) which was published by the Universidad Nacional Experimental de Táchira (UNET) where he worked. Although concentrating on Pieridae, Fernando took every opportunity to sample every species of butterfly he encountered, and was exceedingly adept at spotting new and unusual taxa, specimens of which he freely and generously offered to friends and colleagues for study, especially the two authors of this paper. As a result, his specimens, data, and observations from Hacienda Pánaga and other areas of the country were used in numerous scientific publications, and especially in *The Butterflies of Venezuela* book series (Neild 1996, 2008), in which his contribution was gratefully acknowledged with the naming in his honour of *Adelpha paraena reyi* by the first author (Neild, 1996).

The second site "discovered" by Fernando for lepidopterology was the valley of San Vicente de la Revancha in the Tamá National Park (Táchira). There he spent several months collecting in the Fundo Piedras Blancas, a private

property just above San Vicente, at some 2100-2300 m elevation. As a direct consequence he gathered many new records of butterfly species for Venezuela. However, as Fernando himself acknowledged, the biggest achievement of his lepidopterological career was the discovery of an extraordinary undescribed species of *Catasticta* Butler (see Fig. 2) in the cloud forest of Fundo Piedras Blancas which perfectly mimics the abundant pierid species *Leptophobia eleone* Doubleday. The species is so rare and local, and access to its locality so difficult, that one of the authors of this present paper (TP), who was asked by Fernando to co-author its description, is still probably the only other person privileged to have observed the species in its natural environment. *Catasticta revancha* as it came to be named (Rey & Pyrcz, 1996), is the only endemic species of pierid in Táchira state, and one of the few endemic species of this family in Venezuela. Its appearance is unusual and its phylogenetic status is puzzling to lepidopterists. The sampling in Fundo Piedras Blancas was extremely fruitful and resulted in the discovery of several other taxa, including an endemic subspecies of *Perisama* Doubleday, *P. bomplandii reyi* described by Attal and Crosson du Cormier (2003).

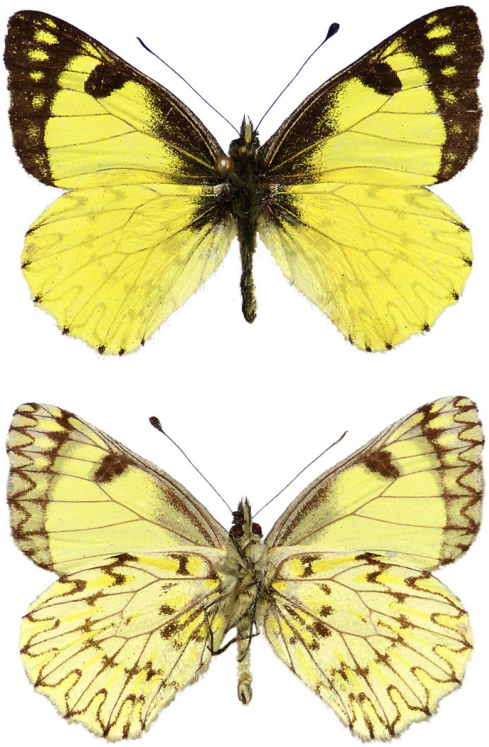


Figure 2. A male of Catasticta revancha Rey & Pyrcz from Fundo Piedra Blanca (3,200 m), Sierra de El Tamá, Táchira, Venezuela (Neild collection, UK). Forewing length is 22 mm.

Although Fernando concentrated his collecting around his home in Táchira state, especially in the Tamá range and in the valley of the upper Doradas river, he also participated in several lepidopterological expeditions to other areas of Venezuela, including south of the Orinoco, in Amazonas and Bolívar states, where he also made important discoveries. These expeditions were often extremely tiring and demanding, and his health suffered in pursuit of his passion, especially in the absence of funds to adequately finance his trips – when he visited Maroa in western Amazonas state, he lived in the shell of an abandoned house where he was bitten mercilessly by mosquitoes, and walked the long and exceedingly hot and humid track towards Yavita daily, suffering severe dehydration which forced him to drink water from streams, leading to severe gastro-intestinal problems. In the early 1990s Fernando made an ascent of the legendary Mount Roraima (Bolívar), during which he collected an individual of an endemic genus and species, subsequently named *Protopedaliodes kukenani* by Viloria and Pyrcz (1994). In 1996 he joined one of us (TP) on an expedition to the Páramo El Tamá (Táchira), which proved to be especially successful, as two new subspecies of *Catasticta* were discovered, throwing new light on the systematics of high elevation species in this genus. They were described by Fernando in co-authorship with the late Janusz Wojtusiak (Poland) as *Catasticta uricoecheae inopa* and *Catasticta tricolor tomasi* (Wojtusiak & Rey, 1999). During the same expedition numerous undescribed taxa of pronophiline satyrines were discovered. They were important contributions to the ongoing faunal study of the Pronophilini of the El Tamá range (Pyrcz & Viloria, 2007). Fernando's contribution to that project was acknowledged by the dedication to him of one of the most beautiful species of pronophiline occurring in that range, *Pedaliodes reyi* (Fig. 3, see Pyrcz & Viloria, 2007). Later trips to the same range during the early years of the 21st century specifically searching for new *Catasticta* once again paid dividends with a notable contribution to the revision of the Venezuelan *Catasticta* by Bollino and Costa (2007), who named *Catasticta philoscia reyi* in gratitude for "his skilful observations and precious notes" about their ethology (Mauro Costa tells us, pers. comm., that Fernando spent more than 70 days totally alone in the cloud forests and páramo of La Revancha , suffering all the trials of character associated with solitude and the extremes of penetrating damp and cold and blazing unrelenting sun). In 2008 Fernando and TP returned to explore the cloud forest and páramo of El Tamá, and once again new and interesting records were added to the faunal list of Táchira and Venezuela. Subsequent to his untimely passing, Fernando's contribution to Venezuelan butterfly science was honoured with the dedication of a brassoline (owl) butterfly *Eryphanis zolvizora reyi* Bristow, Neild, De Sousa & Huertas (Blandin *et al*., 2014).

As we have already noted, Fernando's great passion in life was for butterflies, and to a lesser extent insects. He was a great admirer and a protégé of the late great Venezuelan entomologist Francisco Fernández Yépez, in whose house he stayed during a month long internship in 1985 at the Facultad de Agronomía at the Universidad Central de Venezuela (Maracay). Unable to find paid work in his preferred profession as an entomologist, he returned to Barrio Obrero in San Cristóbal to live with his father, who



Figure 3. A male of Pedaliodes reyi Pyrcz & Viloria from the Betania to La Linea trail (2800-2850 m), Sierra de El Tamá, Táchira, Venezuela (Muzeum Zoologiczne Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków, Poland). Forewing length is 29 mm.

owned a musical school (Cátedra Musical San Cristobal). Like his father and sister, Fernando was a naturally gifted musician. He started to learn the English horn and Oboe, but after his instruments were stolen, had to give up because he was unable to afford to replace them! Instead he studied musical theory and solfège for four years in the Escuela de Música Miguel Ángel Espinel in the late 1980s, after which he taught first and second year students at the Escuela de Música Francisco J. Marciales in nearby Rubio in 1988 and 1989, and later also trained teachers at the Universidad Nacional Experimental de Táchira (UNET), San Cristóbal, in 1990. At the end of the 80s and in the early 90s he took a number of Entomological courses at the UNET, where he found employment from 1990 until 1999, firstly as a technician in the laboratory of entomology at the UNET under the dipterologist Gustavo Perruolo, and then as a curator in the Museum of Entomology. During this period he led occasional lessons and field courses and proved to be a very good teacher highly appreciated by his students. Unfortunately his work was very poorly remunerated, and on many occasions we remember Fernando telling us that he had not been paid for many months. Quite apart from the socio-economic impact that this had on his life, it also frustrated Fernando's wishes to further his interests – he was, for example, never able to afford to subscribe to the Lepidopterists' Society (or to any other entomological association) despite wishing to do so. Eventually financial problems led him to seek other means to support himself. He left San Cristóbal for some years and bred rabbits in La Cristalina, near Capacho. This rabbit farm, which he ran with a friend, was profitable for some years but the business eventually failed. He returned to San Cristóbal and tried all manner of things to make a living such as rearing cats and orchids, or postal stamp exchange. Nothing really went well. He was unemployed for most of the last decade of his life, and his health suffered as a result.

Fernando took comfort in this difficult period from the end of the 90s in the emerging Venezuelan internet service, enthusiastically developing his huge web site at the UNET, even creating a fledgling search engine. He hosted pages covering all of his varied interests, but primarily the Pieridae of Táchira, collectibles such as wooden pencils, as well as the poems that he authored, many of which were published by the local press, and which revealed that he was a real man of renaissance, and highly cultivated (he was fascinated by traditional Indian and Chinese medicine, and took classes of Feng Shui and Yoga).

Even though his situation at times seemed hopeless, Fernando always looked on the bright side of life, and with a quick wit he would dismiss the concerns of well-meaning friends. When asked what he did to occupy himself, he quipped: "in the morning I laze around doing nothing, in the afternoon I rest, and at night I sleep to recover all the energy I lost during my hard day's work!".

Although he never married, nor had children, his poems and good looks attracted the attention of many female admirers, a fact that he certainly appreciated. And so we finish this testament to Fernando by quoting one of his many poems verbatim, because it perfectly illustrates the humble and self-effacing idealist he was …. It was written after finally meeting a woman who was perfect in his eyes. He attempts to list all her wonderful attributes, but words fail him. He finds peace in her company, and knows that his heart and soul will finally sense perfection in her embrace … but ultimately she is unreachable, and disinterested, because, as his personal note that follows the poem so frankly states, he has none of the very attributes that he sees are so perfect in her …

Así eres - alegre, sencilla, laboriosa, simpática, amable y cordial, consciente, humilde, hacendosa, preocupada, constante y especial. . . Detallista, madura, animosa, tierna, sincera y sentimental, sensible, honesta, cariñosa, suave, interesante y esencial. . . Así Eres y aún más, que no sé cómo explicar; y junto a Ti encuentro paz. . . No dudo que he de ganar porque mi alma cambia su faz y mi corazón te empieza a amar.

"Durante muchos años estuve buscando la mujer perfecta y cuando la encontré escribí este soneto en honor a ella …. pero ella seguía buscando al hombre perfecto, porque yo de "eso" no tengo nada."

"Frey", as he used to sign off his emails, always included this phrase below in his digital signature, and we feel it is a fitting epitaph for him …

"Recuerda que cada día de nuestras vidas es importante ... SER ALGO ESPECIAL." (Remember that every day of our lives is important … BE SOMETHING SPECIAL.)

Fernando may not have realised it, but he lived up to this mantra of his. He was indeed very special to those that knew him and loved him. He was a wonderful, warm, charismatic fellow with a heart of gold, and he will be missed by us all.

Note: the facts included in this obituary were collated from a number of sources, including the internet, friends and colleagues, conversations with Fernando's sister Lucía, and a Curriculum Vitae written by Fernando himself. We have attempted to check all the information included above but it has proven impossible to precisely verify some of the details.

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This aberrant Morpho specimen is from the collection of Fred Bower (**freddiebower60@yahoo.com)**, who lives in Lockport, NY. The data that came with the specimen is South America: Colombia, ex pupa 16 August 2012, from T. Mansfield. Fred indicates that this seems to be an aberrant of the species *peleides*, and also indicates that upon discussion with other people that there is some distinct agreement on the species.