

SNR FACT SHEET



CAPE AUTUMN WIDOW (*Dira clytus*)

One of the signs that autumn is approaching is the sight of these velvety brown butterflies flying slowly just above grasses – particularly kikuyu (*Pennisetum clandestinum*). The grass diet of the larvae means that these butterflies are not poisonous, so theoretically they cannot afford to be highly visible and have to rely on camouflage to escape detection. Their prominent wing eyespots are thought to repel predatory birds.



Female



Male

The females are seldom seen on flowers, but fly low over grass tussocks in which they scatter their eggs. The dull brown larvae feed at night on the grasses, and hide during the day. They take all year to mature, and then form a round brown chrysalis deep inside a grass clump. The butterflies tend to hatch out all at the same time between March and April, sometimes occurring in large numbers. Their life span is short and they tend to fly in the early, cooler part of the day, later sheltering under a grass clump.

So when you are jogging or taking your dog for an early walk through Steenbok Park – do keep a look out for these autumn butterflies.

Photographs by Steve Woodhall

Acknowledgements to *Field guide to butterflies of South Africa*, by Steve Woodhall. Cape Town, Struik, 2005

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