

UCRBG Newsletter

BUTTERFLY CORNER - VARIABLE CHECKERSPOT

Article and photos by Ann Platzter



Photo 1: Dorsal view

The Variable Checkerspot (*Euphydryas chalcedona*), in the family Nymphalidae, is a variable and challenging butterfly to identify. The numerous butterflies we saw on Cleghorn Road near Silverwood Lake had black-brown background color with extensive white checkering on the dorsal wings and red dots at the margins (Photo 1: dorsal view), while ventrally the wings were orange with large white spots (Photo 2 on page 3: left specimen, ventral view). The two diagnostic characteristics to identify the Variable Checkerspot are these: white off-center dots along the upper side of the abdomen plus luminous yellow antennal clubs. Their wingspan is about two inches, although the female is larger and heavier than the male.

The range of the Variable Checkerspot is western North America where it stretches from Alaska in the north to Baja California in the south and extends east through the Rocky Mountains into Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, and

Wyoming. It is commonly seen in Southern California flying from March through June. The butterfly's habitat encompasses a large variety of environments including sagebrush flats, desert hills, prairies, open forests, and alpine tundra. Despite a wide range of acceptable habitats, this species seldom strays into suburbs.

The female Variable Checkerspot lays a large cluster of eggs only on large host plants capable of sustaining all her larvae from one egg mass. The female lays her eggs on plants from several different families, all of which contain toxins known as iridoid glycosides that are bitter-tasting compounds to predators. These noxious chemicals occur in such host plants as bush monkey flower (*Diplacus pumceus*), shrubby penstemon (*Penstemon fruticosus*), Indian paintbrush (*Castilleja coccinea*) and tall-fringed bluebells (*Mertensia ciliata*). Upon hatching, these larvae feed communally and overwinter as larvae, then the following spring they continue to eat although individually. During drought, larvae can hibernate for several years.

The Variable Checkerspot is an avid flower visitor and usually flies slow and low above vegetation. It is not easily frightened and will usually stay in one place long enough for you to observe it closely. We saw a dozen taking nectar on a large patch of blooming yerba santa (*Eriodictyon trichocalyx*) at Oak Glen, ignoring our presence. Other nectar flowers include California buckeye (*Aesculus californica*), black sage (*Salvia mellifera*), dwarf sunflower (*Helianthus gracilentus*) and globe gilia (*Gilia capitata*).

The developing Variable Checkerspot accumulates the bitter tasting

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Director's Report - Dr. Jodie Holt



As winter approaches amid uncertainty about how the next few months of the pandemic will unfold, I sincerely hope that all of you remain safe and healthy. Here in the Gardens we are fortunate that our staff are well and have the opportunity to work in an outdoor environment that poses little risk of illness, although with a few hazards such as snakes, falling limbs, and the like.

During this time when holiday gatherings are anticipated and treasured but not advised, even brief interactions with others bring a sense of comfort and even joy after so many months of relative solitude. A drive in the car, trip to a store, or conversation with the mail carrier can restore perspective that this time will pass. Those of us who are able to work in the Gardens have enjoyed a powerful sense of normalcy over the past few months. Even while wearing face coverings and staying a safe distance apart we interact with each other and our visitors while appreciating the constancy and grounding effect of being in nature. Over the past few years, I have been struck by how many scientific and lay articles have emerged with evidence of the healing effects of simply going outside and experiencing nature. I wrote about this very subject in my [Spring 2019 Director's Report](#). Now more than ever we can all benefit from spending time outdoors. I encourage you to take some time and visit the UCR Botanic Gardens for a dose of healing, inspiration, and awe.

While literally everything has slowed down this year, here in the Gardens we have continued to think about ways to engage with our constituents, provide enriching virtual experiences, and enhance the visitor experience. In place of the Fall Garden Market & Plant Sale we held our second Online Plant Sale, which was even more successful than the first. Curator Janine is working with volunteers to video short tours in the Gardens focusing on popular native plants for the home garden. Program Coordinator Pam has been working with volunteers to offer our first virtual workshop in December, which filled quickly. Manager Miguel has overseen the pruning and removal of hazardous branches and trees in areas frequented by visitors. He supervises a team of staff and volunteers who keep the Gardens clean and beautiful, and he has implemented many improvements in irrigation and other horticultural areas.

I hope you enjoy reading about what's happening in the Gardens and make time to visit and experience the healing power of nature. As this unprecedented year ends, we are grateful for all who read this and support us—our members, volunteers, donors, campus partners—you! Please stay connected through our website, eNews, and social media. I welcome your ideas and feedback at bgdirector@ucr.edu or 951-827-7095.

Jodie

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Photo 2: Left specimen, ventral view

compounds from its host plants; thus, the eggs, larvae, pupae, and adults are all bad tasting to predators. Predators quickly learn that Variable Checkerspot colors are associated with bad tastes and avoid them. To advertise its distastefulness, this species often spreads its wings when resting so is easy to spot. Here again is another example where bright colors appear as a model for various mimics such as the Mormon Metalmark (see UCRBG Newsletter, Vol. 38, No. 2, Summer 2018).

Happy Butterfly Gardening!

AP

Thanks to Edward Platzer for reviewing this article.

Fall Online Plant Sale

In late October we held our second Online Plant Sale when in a normal year we would have hosted our Fall Garden Market & Plant Sale. As in August, the sale of plants and BG-branded items was all conducted online, and purchasers selected a date and time for in-person pickups at the Gardens entrance. While in August the online sale was split into a Friends members-only sale and a public sale, this time the two were combined into one online sale with Friends members receiving a 10% discount on all plants. Both online sales were very successful, and the in-person pickups were handled efficiently, safely, and while following all Covid-related requirements.

What stands out in the minds of Botanic Gardens' staff and Plant Sale volunteers is the support and gratitude of all the customers of the Fall Online Plant Sale. We were not expecting this sale to be as large as the previous one in August because the two sales were so close together, but we were wrong. This time there were 168 orders totaling over \$11,000, netting nearly \$10,000 after taxes were taken out! This revenue is less than for our normal in-person Fall Plant Sale; however, there are few event expenses for an online sale, so all revenue can be used to cover cost of materials and to support the staff that made the sale possible. Although our staff are enjoying the ease of these online sales, we know our customers are anxious to have plant sales in the Gardens once again, which we also look forward to once we are permitted and it is safe to do so. I am sure we all agree that there is nothing quite like seeing all our plants displayed against the beautiful backdrop of the Botanic Gardens and enjoying the comradery of fellow plant lovers.



Lois Whyde tending to the plants for Plant Sale



Plant orders packaged and ready for pick-up

Spotlight On...Karen Fleisher

By Janine Almanzor



Of all the wonderful adjectives that describe Karen, the words “energetic” and “innovative” are foremost on my mind. She is full of life as she comes bounding into the Botanic Gardens’ office with her great

ideas for new events. Not only does she come up with the event idea, but she also runs with it from start to finish. Dedicated, hardworking, mover and shaker, and joyful also describe Karen Fleisher.

Karen’s love for the Gardens prompted her to begin volunteering in 2006 while she was still working as a medical transcriptionist/editor. She began volunteering at Plant Sales doing whatever was needed. From 2010 to 2014 Karen was very active as a member of the Friends Board of Directors. This opened her eyes to see many needs due to limited staffing and she took action to meet those needs. She has done an excellent job coordinating the Silent Auction for Primavera since 2014. Karen’s goal is always to relieve the load on Gardens’ staff. Therefore, from soliciting Silent Auction donations to staffing the event with her volunteer team, she coordinates it all!



2013 - Theresa McLemore & Karen at a Keep the Gardens Clean & Beautiful event.

Upon retirement from a 35-year career, Karen became a Master Gardener in 2010, which furthered her involvement at the Gardens. Karen was the liaison between the Master Gardeners and the Botanic Gardens for many years, coordinating volunteers for Botanic Gardens events. Karen has been instrumental in onboarding many new volunteers for the Gardens. Working with Gardens’ staff, she organizes and leads regular Volunteer Orientations. Seeing the need for volunteers to greet visitors on the weekends, Karen came up with the Garden Steward program. The program began for the purpose of assisting the limited staff on the weekends when the visitor population was the highest and staff presence the lowest. Since the Gardens reopened this June 29th the program has expanded due to the need for a Garden Steward at

the entrance during all open hours. Karen is often one of those Stewards.

In 2016 Karen expanded her knowledge of the Gardens by training to be a Docent. Her extensive knowledge of California native plants opened the door for her to co-lead the UCR class field trip, Restoration Ecology. For many years, a local high school’s Biology course studied California native plants and utilized the vast collection at the Gardens. Karen saw the great opportunity to instruct potential future botanists and took the initiative to coordinate with the high school instructors and arrange tours at the Gardens.

Karen’s largest undertaking has been the very successful Art in the Gardens event. She came up with the idea and made it happen. Once again, her desire is to lessen the burden of events on Gardens’ staff, so she does most of the work! The Succulent Driftwood Class and the Online Living Succulent Wreath Class are other examples of events that Karen initiated and carried through with minimal staff involvement.



2018 - Karen volunteering in the library.



2019 - Deborah Lewis, Karen & Pam Roose at a work day.

In addition to her involvement at the Gardens, Karen is equally as active with the Gates Cactus and Succulent Society and the UCCE Master Gardeners. She received the Master Gardener Cathy Konyn award in 2017-2018 for being a shaker and mover. Karen is also a member of the California Native Plant Society and the Old Riverside Foundation. She truly is the exemplar of an exceptional volunteer!

Reminiscing...

We look forward to a time when we can once again welcome you in person to *Primavera in the Gardens*. In the meantime, please enjoy a few pictures of our members and guests enjoying last year's event!



Stephen King & Darlene Cunningham



Norm Ellstrand & Tracy Kahn



Rosemary & Greg Neal



Jeff Holmes & Kathryn Uhrich



George Spiliotis



Amber Jones, Lucy Heyming & Phyllis Franco



Patricia Bartle



Jane & Richard Block & Frank Heyming



Edie Allen, Rob Lennox & Mike Allen



Bill Kleese



Mien Van de Ven, Antoon Ploeg & Peter Atkinson



Gina Barton, Linda Carter, Karen Fleisher, Carol Haffter, Helga Stafford & Denise Ritz

The Pomegranate and Persephone in the Underworld

By JoAnn Anderson

Plants and Human Affairs

Since the dawn of time, there has been a continuous thread of interaction between all forms of life on earth. We do not always recognize those relationships and their influence on our lives, but they are present beneath the surface, nevertheless. In this series, we will spotlight some well-known and some not-so-well-known impacts of the plant kingdom on human culture and civilization. You may find yourself coming to the Gardens or walking in your own garden, looking around and wondering, "What will that plant do for some future civilization on Earth or in space, and how can I nurture it?"



This is the time of year when we sense the coming of short days and lengthening darkness; even in sunny southern California there is a feeling of the earth preparing for winter. So too it was in ancient Greece, which enjoyed a Mediterranean climate like that in California.

The ancient Greeks believed that Demeter, the goddess of vegetation and grain, was responsible for the abundance of the earth that provided much of their nourishment. Her daughter, Persephone, shared Demeter's place in the Greek pantheon. Persephone was exceedingly beautiful, and one day while she was in the fields, the god of the underworld, Hades, spotted her and fell instantly and deeply in love with her. Not being a subtle guy, he grabbed her and took her with him to the Underworld to be his bride and rule with him over Hades.

Demeter was heartbroken and wandered the earth unceasingly in search of her lost daughter. During this time, the fields grew barren and the earth no longer

provided its abundance. Demeter eventually learned where Persephone had been taken and journeyed to the underworld to rescue her to once again rule over the green richness of earth. However, Persephone was allowed to return with Demeter only if she had eaten nothing during her time with Hades. Unfortunately, Hades had tricked her into eating six pomegranate seeds, and so Persephone was allowed to return to the earth for only six months of the year and then had to return to the underworld for the other six months.

In our modern calendar, the abduction of Persephone would likely have coincided with the fall, around September or October, and her return with spring, sometime around Easter. Her journey to the underworld also coincides with the time when pomegranates become ripe in the fall, and the time of dormancy of much of our vegetation. Darkness falls on the earth, resembling the same darkness that Persephone endured in the underworld.

The pomegranate (*Punica granatum*) is native to the Middle East and abundant in the Mediterranean region. The species thrives here in southern California. In inland valleys it is deciduous, whereas by the coast it is semi-deciduous. Pomegranates thrive in warm climates and frost is not a problem when they are dormant, although in the late fall or early spring they can be frost sensitive. Pomegranates prefer well drained soil but can tolerate wet, heavy soils. They are very drought-tolerant, but their fruit yield is much better with about the same irrigation as citrus trees. The pomegranate can grow as a multiple-trunked or single-trunked tree or as a large shrub. Due to variations in seedlings there are many selections available. One common variety with which you may be familiar is called 'Wonderful'.



You can visit a pomegranate tree in the Botanic Gardens and imagine how Persephone succumbed to the attraction of its jewel-like seeds, which are also popular with our local wildlife.

UCR and Botanic Gardens COVID-19 Update

UCR remains in a Phase 2 Recovery Plan, outlined here: <https://campusreturn.ucr.edu>, and the Gardens continues to follow all requirements of UCR, Riverside County, California State, and the CDC.

Due to the need to permanently staff the entrance gate we remain open for limited hours, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. until 12 noon. We recently recruited a few more volunteer Stewards for the gate so have added two open Sundays per month, 8 a.m. until 12 noon. When we can increase staffing and/or Stewards we will continue to expand our open hours.

The following restrictions remain in effect to prevent the spread of Covid-19:

- ▶ Staff gate attendants to insure adherence to all policies
- ▶ Facial masks or coverings required for entry **and** when physical distancing from others is not possible
- ▶ Physical distancing of at least 6 feet required from others not in your party
- ▶ Group size limited to 10 persons
- ▶ Designated restrooms open with hand sanitizer available
- ▶ Drinking fountains closed but bottle hydration stations open
- ▶ New touchless online functions including payment of admission donation

The UCR campus remains closed with only critical operations continuing, including remote instruction. Faculty research remains limited, nonessential staff are working remotely, and all events are suspended. Campus status and updates are posted here: <https://campusstatus.ucr.edu>.

We are fortunate to be able to welcome visitors to our beautiful Botanic Gardens and provide a safe space for enjoying our gardens, wildlife, and a chance to get some exercise. Please visit our website for updates on our status, hours, and upcoming events.

Become a Friend

JOIN
OR
RENEW
NOW!

Memberships may be renewed on the UCRBG website: <https://gardens.ucr.edu>

Benefits of Membership

- **Early entry to plant sales; members-only plant sales; discounts on online plant sales**
- **Quarterly Newsletter in digital or print format**
- **Reduced price for select UCRBG events**
- **Members-only events**
- **Use of Horticultural Library**
- **10% discount at local businesses:**
 - **Bonnett Irrigation**
 - **Louie's Nursery**
 - **Paradise Garden Center**
 - **Parkview Nurseries**
- **Discounted or free entry to over 330 gardens, arboreta & conservatories in the U.S. through the American Horticultural Society's Reciprocal Admissions Program, <https://ahsgardening.org/gardening-programs/rap>**

Wildlife of the Gardens

Phainopepla

By Michele Felix-Derbarmdiker



Phainopepla male

When you think of symbols of the holiday season, some of those symbols may be birds. You may think of images of cardinals, chickadees, doves, possibly a penguin. One bird that may not evoke holiday memories is the Phainopepla (*Phainopepla nitens*), although its favorite food, mistletoe, probably does. The Phainopepla is a striking bird with its jet-black body, rock-n-roll style crest and piercing red eyes. You may never have noticed this stylish bird but with a few facts, you will notice this beauty all over Southern California.

Habitat/Feeding

The Phainopepla is not very finicky when it comes to its home. It is considered a bird of the desert southwest but can be found in chaparral, riparian woodlands, and oak foothills. Here in California, in the cooler winter months they reside in the mesquite and desert scrub. As temperatures rise and food supplies shift, they move to cooler coastal habitats such as riparian woodlands or oak woodlands. In desert habitats they prefer to feed on the plant parasite mistletoe; on the coast they eat insects and native berries. While the Phainopepla relies heavily on mistletoe berries, mistletoe also relies on the bird. After passing through the digestive track, the skinless berries stick to the branches of trees and sprout new clumps.

Breeding

This bird is distinctive in its breeding habits compared to other North American Passerines. Breeding begins with the male courting the female. The male tries to charm the female by chasing her or offering her a meal. The pair will build a well-hidden cup nest of plant fibers, twigs, animal hair and spider webs. Mistletoe clumps provide excellent

nest camouflage. Both parents help in the incubation and rearing of the chicks.

Now this is where it gets interesting. It appears this species breeds twice a year in two types of habitats! So far, research is showing that these birds are breeding once in late winter in their desert homes then breeding again in coastal habitats in the spring. Even the behavior of this bird changes when it makes the habitat switch. In the desert it is very aggressive in defending its territory, while on the coast they form loose colonies and even share food supplies. Further research needs to be done in order to answer all the questions surrounding this bird's behavior.

Identification

The Phainopepla is a medium sized member of the silky-flycatcher family. It has a pointed beak, long slender tail and ability to imitate other bird calls. You are most likely to see this bird perched high on a tree. When perched, it proudly displays its crest and flicks its tail.



Phainopepla female

Here are a few things to notice:

- Shiny jet-black feathers in males, gray in females
- Tall slender head crest
- Red eyes
- Black bill
- White wing patches in flight
- Juveniles extremely similar in appearance to female but note yellowish coloring in bill

Threats

It is believed that populations are stable at this time. Numbers have fallen slightly over the last few decades due to loss of habitat. Many of the areas this bird prefers for breeding are sought after for agricultural use.

Michele is a UCR graduate who worked as a field biologist for six years throughout Riverside County and is currently a naturalist for Riverside-Corona Resource Conservation District.

What to See in the Gardens

By Miguel Estrada

In past articles I have mentioned trees, shrubs, and succulents, but it is also important to point out some of the things we are working on to enhance your experience at the Gardens. Below are a few of my recommendations. Hopefully you can visit more than once to see the progress of some of these projects.

Trails



Deeply rutted trail



A repaired trail

Whether you are a newcomer or a seasoned visitor you will notice that some of our trails require more than the casual step to get a footing. For the most part we have well-draining soils, which means large soil particles that give way to wind and water erosion. After several seasons of rain, certain trails have experienced greater degradation, displaying grooves as deep as 18 inches. We are a few days in on trail repairs in the farthest end of the Gardens along the Coastal Sage Scrub area. We will be working on this project until December, so if you have a chance, stop by and take a look. It may not be an impressive flower or a majestic tree, but trails are what will get you to them, and therefore important to mention.

Turfgrass



The goal for spring

As anyone who has ever attempted to keep uniform color and texture on a stand of turfgrass will tell you, it takes a lot of work. We are not trying create a pristine green monoculture; instead, we are looking to promote plant vigor. That means following a fertilization program, aeration, seeding, weeding,

and proper irrigation. Starting in late January you will get a chance to see us begin our renovation process in which we will remove the dormant bermudagrass and prepare the grass area for seeding



Turfgrass in need of reseeded

in February. A few of you out there might be asking why not plant in fall? Unfortunately, we still have triple digit temperatures in October and heavy leaf drop in November, which pushes the start beyond the desired time.

Latin America



Prosopis chilensis, Chilean mesquite

If you are looking for a good specimen to view, then head over to trail marker #4 in Latin America and take the path that leads you to trail marker #11. Before you reach the halfway point, to the east you will find a large *Prosopis chilensis*. The Chilean mesquite tree generally grows to a height and width of 30 feet. The specimen I recommend is near that height but easily exceeds the width with a crown over 50 feet. This species is deciduous but even when it leafs out with its small bipinnately compound leaves, the shade capacity is low. Though not great as a shade tree, it provides a beautiful view in the early morning when the sunlight filters through.

For more to see in the Botanic Gardens please visit our webpage on what blooms each month throughout the year, at <https://gardens.ucr.edu/information/bloom>.

In The Works

By Botanic Gardens Staff

Aided by cooling weather this fall, our staff and volunteers have continued to maintain the Gardens, implement safety improvements, and make progress on new initiatives. Here is a summary of our activities, some of which are described more fully in articles elsewhere.

On-site:

- ▶ Our partial opening with Covid-safety restrictions has gone well and we have recruited new volunteer Stewards to allow us to expand our hours to two Sundays per month.
- ▶ We were finally able to secure a contract arborist to prune and remove unsafe trees and our staff have been busy cutting up and removing the downed wood and slash.
- ▶ After a large branch of the sweet bay in the Herb Garden fell on the road the rest of the tree had to be removed; we are considering how to replace it as soon as it is feasible.
- ▶ Cleanup in Australia was completed by the removal of the last slash piles; this area is looking its very best and waiting for your visit.
- ▶ In response to the expanded fire season in California our staff cleared fire breaks along the fence line near houses and large shrubs and along our perimeter road.
- ▶ We added safety contact information to all our wooden signs throughout the Gardens, similar to what is posted on our numbered waypoints.
- ▶ Our staff are now wearing new blue safety vests that display our colorful agave image so visitors can more easily find someone on site if needed.
- ▶ We held our second online plant sale with in-person pickups, which was even more organized and efficient than the first; we are very grateful for our campus partners and team of volunteers for making these sales possible.

Remote work:

- ▶ Working with UCR Advancement we have migrated our eNews to the UCR Mail Chimp platform to better reach our broad constituency and respond to recipients' email preferences.
- ▶ As a project for UCR's Plant Taxonomy class, Janine completed a new interactive GIS Story Map of Plant Evolution which is the theme of our in-progress Conservatory.
- ▶ We are working with UCR TAPS (Transportation and Parking Services) to expand parking access for UCRBG visitors, make parking payment easier, and possibly bundle it with admission donations before entering the Gardens.
- ▶ Instead of our usual in-person Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon we hosted a contactless appreciation event for our current volunteers and gifted each with a pot of succulents created by Lois, delicious treats from Baguette Bakery & Café, a UCRBG branded coaster, and a personal note.
- ▶ Working with a professor in the Biology Department we hosted our first class field trip since reopening, with students all wearing masks and maintaining physical distancing.



Contact information on signs



Miguel Estrada wearing the new safety vest



Gift bags for current volunteers

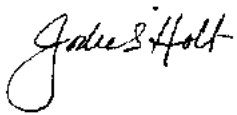


Biology 163 class field trip

The year 2020 has been a startling departure from expectations and its impact has been felt by all. We in the public and nonprofit sectors are keenly aware of our reliance on the generosity of our supporters, especially during a year like this. Your support enables us to advance our mission of serving as an oasis of nature, source of learning, and place of respite. The Botanic Gardens have been a beloved UCR institution for over 55 years, welcoming thousands of visitors each month, educating scores of school children on guided tours, engaging hundreds of participants in our events, and offering Gardens-grown plants to beautify home landscapes. For decades UCR students have used the Gardens to conduct research, engage in field trips, escape schoolwork, meet friends, and introduce their parents to this iconic treasure. Even with current restrictions we enthusiastically continue to pursue these goals.

Your contribution will keep our Gardens and valuable programs growing strong for many years to come. Please make your gift today!

I look forward to seeing you in the Gardens.



Jodie S. Holt, Ph.D.

Director

UCR Botanic Gardens



Your Legacy in the Gardens

You may wish to have an impact that will ensure the beauty and vitality of the UCR Botanic Gardens for future generations to enjoy. There are many ways to accomplish this, including a gift through your will or a charitable gift annuity that pays income back to you. You may direct your gift to general support of the Gardens or any one of our special projects or programs.

If you would like more information on how to leave a legacy to the UCR Botanic Gardens, please contact:

Dounia Sadeghi
 Assistant Dean for Development
 College of Natural and Agricultural Sciences
 951.827.3067
 Dounia.sadeghi@ucr.edu

If you have already remembered the Gardens in your plans, please let us know as we would appreciate the opportunity to steward your generous gift.



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UCRBG Virtual Opportunities

GIS Map App

<https://ucr.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=36bf2fdff28f4339988321700f82>

Plant Ecology in the UCR Botanic Gardens Story Map

<https://arcg.is/H8fO>

Deserts of the Southwest Story Map

<https://arcg.is/1n9WGa>

Plant Diversity at the UCRBG Conservatory Story Map

<https://arcg.is/1HHPzj>

Please note: The UCRBG hours are Monday - Friday 9:00 am - 12:00 pm
and the first and third Sundays 8:00 am - 12:00 pm
until further notice.