

Richmond Birdwing Butterfly

Australia's largest subtropical butterfly is threatened by a garden escapee from South America.



Birdwing Butterfly Vine
Image: Jasmine Connors



Birdwing Butterfly Vine Leaf
Image: Jasmine Connors



Birdwing Butterfly Vine Flower
Image: Ian Gynther



Birdwing Butterfly Vine Seed Capsule
Image: Ian Gynther



Birdwing Butterfly Vine Dried Seeds
Image: Ian Gynther



Male Richmond Birdwing Butterfly
Image: Elliot Bowerman



Female Richmond Birdwing Butterfly
Image: Richard Bull



Richmond Birdwing Butterfly Larva
Image: Richard Bull

The Butterfly

With an adult wingspan of up to 16cm the Richmond Birdwing Butterfly (*Ornithoptera richmondia*) is one of Australia's largest butterflies. The females have a mix of dark brown or black, white, cream and yellow markings while the males have distinctive iridescent green or blue markings. Combined with their large size the males in particular are quite beautiful and striking. They are only found in the coastal and hinterland parts of South East Queensland and northern New South Wales. Due to threats from habitat destruction as well as introduction of an invasive weed species, they are now listed as a Vulnerable species in Queensland.

The Birdwing Butterfly Vine

The larva (caterpillar) has only two legitimate food sources, the Birdwing Butterfly Vine (*Pararistolochia praevenosa*) and Mountain Aristolochia (*Pararistolochia laheyana*) at higher altitudes. These vines emit pheromones to attract the butterfly. The Birdwing Butterfly Vine has been listed as Near Threatened in Queensland.

The Dutchman's Pipe

An escaped garden vine, Dutchman's Pipe (*Aristolochia elegans*, also known as *Aristolochia littoralis*) emits an odour which also attracts the butterfly. The attraction is so strong that the butterfly prefers it over the Birdwing Butterfly Vine. Sadly, when eggs are laid and hatch on the Dutchman's Pipe the caterpillars are poisoned by eating the leaves.

The Dutchman's Pipe is classified as a Category 3 Invasive Plant in Queensland, which means it must not be distributed either by sale or gift, or released into the environment.



Dutchman's Pipe
Image: Elliot Bowerman



Dutchman's Pipe Seeds
Image: Forest & Kim Starr



Dutchman's Pipe Dried Seeds
Image: Forest & Kim Starr

The Impact of Weeds on our Catchments

The introduction of one exotic plant has severely threatened the entire population of a butterfly species. All over our landscape, weeds that have escaped from cultivated gardens are outcompeting our native plants and have the potential to completely change habitats. The health of vegetation along our creeks, as well as throughout our catchment, directly affects the water quality flowing into our drinking water supply, and ultimately into our estuaries and oceans.

Species Recovery

Much has been done over the years to restore the Richmond Birdwing Butterfly's habitat. The Richmond Birdwing Conservation Network (RBCN) has been the key group leading the conservation effort with projects including mass planting of the native vine, mapping the spread of the Dutchman's Pipe, raising and releasing the butterfly into the wild, and modelling the impact of climate change on the butterfly. The network also records sightings of the butterfly, which assists with mapping out their current habitat.

What you can do

There are many things you can do to assist with the recovery of the Richmond Birdwing Butterfly, as well as protecting our waterways from the impact of weeds.

- Contribute to Citizen Science by learning how to identify the Richmond Birdwing Butterfly, Birdwing Butterfly Vine, and Dutchman's Pipe, and reporting your sightings. ECOLlaboration have launched a postcard to assist people with identifying and reporting the three key species.
- Join or donate to the Richmond Birdwing Conservation Network.
- Educate others about the impact of Dutchman's Pipe on the Richmond Birdwing Butterfly.
- Remove the Dutchman's Pipe weed from your property. It is a good idea to have the identification confirmed by someone experienced in plant identification until you are comfortable identifying it yourself, as there are native vines in the Aristolochia and Pararistolochia families which may be confused with the Dutchman's Pipe.
- Find out if the Birdwing Butterfly Vine is a suitable plant for your property. Sunshine Coast suppliers include *Coolum Community Native Nursery*, *Mooloolah Landcare Nursery*, *Noosa and District Landcare*, and *Barung Landcare Community Nursery*.
- Shop at native plant nurseries and plant local native species on your property.
- Dispose of your lawn and garden clippings appropriately by composting them, putting them in your Green Waste bin, putting them in your General Waste bin, or taking them directly to the tip.
- Join your local bushcare group and participate in weeding and planting activities to protect your local waterway from invasive species. Most councils have a list of bushcare groups available on their website.
- Find out more and report sightings at:
www.ecoeducationsservice.org.au/richmondbirdwingbutterfly



ECOLlaboration's Richmond Birdwing Butterfly postcard

Contact us: info@ecollaboration.org.au or (07) 5476-4777

Find us online: www.ecollaboration.org.au