

Richmond Birdwing



The Richmond Birdwing Butterfly has become extinct in two-thirds of its original range. Coordinated protection of habitats and planting of vines in corridors are essential to halt a further decline in its distribution of and local extinctions.



The Richmond birdwing butterfly (*Ornithoptera richmondia*) is the largest subtropical Australian butterfly.

- The adult male birdwing has a wingspan of about 12-13cm and is basically black, with green stripes and spots on both sides of the wings, and patches of green on the hind wings.
- The adult female is up to 14-16 cm, and black with white patches on both wings and a yellow band on the lower edge of the hind wings..
- Both male and female have a distinctive red patch on the body beneath the base of the wings and a green stripe on top of the thorax

The Richmond birdwing butterfly was once abundant from Maryborough to Grafton, breeding in rainforest habitat wherever the food plants were plentiful. Much of this land was eagerly sought after for agriculture. In 1870 the butterfly was reported in newspapers as occurring in the thousands on the streets of Brisbane, but by 1926 there had been a massive decline.

Richmond Birdwing Recovery Programs

The caterpillars (or larvae) only feed naturally on two species of vines – the low-land Richmond birdwing vine (*Pararistolochia praevenosa*) and the mountain aristolochia (*Pararistolochia laheyana*). These two plants have both been cultivated in order to assist in recovery of the breeding habitats for the butterfly. A similar looking vine, the weed Dutchman's Pipe, is toxic to the caterpillars, leading to the loss of all larvae.

The butterflies' preferred habitat is dry rainforest, which still exists in patches along the Brisbane River and up Woogaroo and Opossum Creeks in Brookwater and Bellbird Park. The Richmond Birdwing butterflies have been sighted at Indooroopilly, just over 10km away as the butterfly flies, and in the D'Aguilar Range near Brookfield. The butterflies can sense the vine's presence from many kilometres away, and thus planting in the Greater Springfield / Bellbird Park area will provide habitat to attract the butterflies and act as a stepping stone for them to travel from the D'Aguilar Range and the Brisbane River to other habitat along Teviot Brook and the Logan River, and thus allow genetic mixing that will strengthen the gene pool.



Male Richmond Birdwing Butterfly
Photo © Carolyn Rifello



If you would like to assist in the recovery of this magnificent butterfly, then please contact **Springfield Lakes Nature Care (SLNC)** at info@springfieldlakesnaturecare.org.au. SLNC will be running workshops on how to grow the food vine and able to provides access to vines for planting.