

TASMANIAN HAIRSTREAK BUTTERFLY

Pseudalmenus chlorinda myrsilus

Status

Rare (Tasmanian *Threatened Species Protection Act 1995*), due to the fragmented population, low number of individuals and habitat loss and degradation.

Description

A small attractive butterfly with a wingspan of between 22 and 28mm. The upperparts of the forewings are black with two small orange spots. The hindwings have a narrow reddish-orange submarginal band and a conspicuous fine tail at vein two which is quite noticeable when the butterfly is in flight. Beneath is light-grey with a narrow black band crossing the forewing and a narrow red band on the outer margin of the hindwing. The female is larger, 28–30mm, than the male, 26–28mm, and has a broad orange band crossing the forewing and a variable orange blotch in the centre of the hindwing (Couchman and Couchman 1977).

Distribution and habitat

The hairstreak butterfly *Pseudalmenus chlorinda* has a widespread but local distribution from northern NSW to western Victoria and Tasmania (McQuillan 1994). There are currently eight recognised sub-species, four of which occur in Tasmania. *P. c. myrsilus* occurs only on the south-east coast, known only from the Tasman and Forestier Peninsulas and a small area of the east coast opposite Maria Island (Prince 1999).

P. c. myrsilus has a complicated life cycle involving its food plant, silver wattle *Acacia dealbata*, a pupation/larval site under the bark of a nearby mature eucalypt tree (most commonly *E. viminalis*), and an obligatory relationship between the larvae and the small black ant *Iridomyrex foetans* (Prince 1987, McQuillan 1994). The ants are thought to play a vital role in defence and prevention of parasitism (Prince 1987).

Important locations

Important locations for *P. c. myrsilus* include Cape Fredrick Hendrick, Coal Mine Hill, Lime Bay, Mount Stewart (Lime Bay), Saltwater River and Rheban Spit.

Threats, limiting factors and management issues

Clearing, habitat fragmentation and excessive burning have all been suggested as potential causes of the decline in this species (Prince 1987; Couchman and Couchman 1977). *P. c. myrsilus* appears to be largely sedentary, and isolated populations may be extremely vulnerable to extinction and are unlikely to be recolonised (Prince 1987). Many populations occur in association with a single eucalypt tree even when apparently suitable habitat exists nearby (Prince 1987).

The subspecies has probably always had a very restricted distribution, however all the known populations are small and fragmented, occurring within isolated pockets of remnant vegetation, and are at risk of ongoing degradation of habitat.

A number of the known populations occur within reserves but this has not prevented the degradation of habitat within these sites. Repeated firing has degraded the Lime Bay Nature Reserve and adjacent Coal Mines Historic Site to the extent that populations of the subspecies may now be close to extinction (Prince 1987).

Reading

Couchman, L.E. & Couchman, R. (1977) *Tasmanian Year Book*. No. 11. Hobart, Tasmania.

McQuillan, P. (1994) *Butterflies of Tasmania*. Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Prince, G.B. (1987) The conservation status of the hairstreak butterfly *Pseudalmenus chlorinda* Blanchard in Tasmania. Report to the Department of Lands, Parks and Wildlife, Tasmania.