

Bringing Butterflies Back

Backyards for Wildlife Fact Sheet

Butterflies of South Australia

South Australia is home to a unique array of butterflies. The insect order Lepidoptera refers to butterflies and moths. It is believed that prior to European settlement 54 permanent species inhabited South Australia. Since then a total of 77 butterflies have been recorded in South Australia, of which only 1 is endemic – the Lithochroa blue (*Jalmenus lithochroa*).

Having them flitting about your garden can be a wonderful sight, and they also play an important role in the local ecosystem.

Habitat Requirements

Specific native plants play a key role throughout the various stages of a butterfly's lifecycle – these plants should be incorporated into your garden to address these specific needs. The female butterfly is usually very selective in the plant she chooses to lay her eggs on and this will be different for each species. Plants essential to the ongoing survival of a particular butterfly species are referred to as the host plant and provide the food requirements for the larvae. Without these essential host plants the particular butterfly species will not be able to reproduce and will therefore disappear from the local environment.

Butterflies are fussy eaters and some species will rely on only one or two plant species for survival. Adult butterflies are nectar feeders. Include a variety of nectar producing plants to ensure there is food available in your garden throughout the year. Main plant foods include sedges, native grasses and mistletoe. Butterflies have an acute sense of smell and will travel vast distances to reach the plant can detect.

Water

An area of bare ground, ideally in a wet part of the garden, will ensure a ready supply of water for your local butterflies.

Chemical Use

Chemicals use should be minimised and pesticides eliminated if you want a butterfly friendly garden.



The Caper White Butterfly (Photo Ben Moulton) migrates from Northern Australia to Adelaide during October to December.

Threats

Habitat clearance and urban development has resulted in the loss of specialised environments impacting the floral diversity required to sustain, and then complete, a butterfly's lifecycle. Consequently many Lepidopterans are either rare or threatened.

Some of the reasons for decline include:

- Clearance of native vegetation
- Drainage of swamps
- Overgrazing, mowing and trampling of grasslands
- Inappropriate fire regimes
- Urbanisation
- Use of pesticides (in particular aerial spraying)

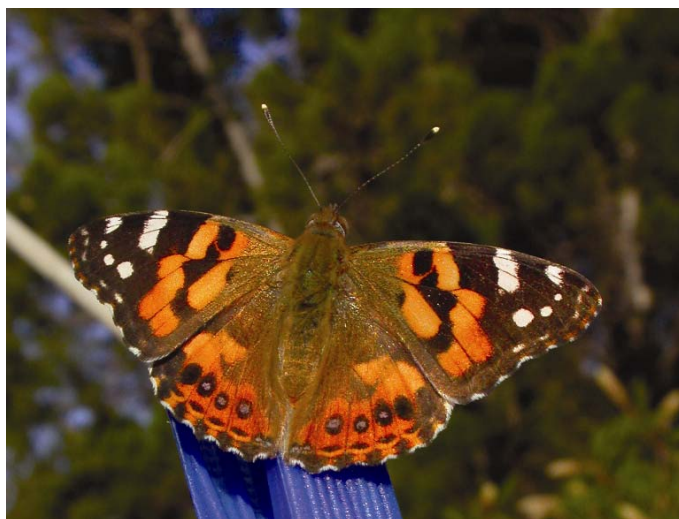
Some species are only found in coastal areas or are specialised for mallee and woodland vegetation associations. Most butterflies are unable to adapt to altered conditions and the loss of a particular plant from an area can be directly responsible for the loss of a species dependent on that plant. For example, the coastal Bitterbush Blue butterfly relies on the Coast bitter-bush (*Adriana klotzschii*) for habitat and the disappearance of this plant from coastal areas has impacted upon the population of this now endangered species.

What Can You Do?

Get in touch with Butterfly Conservation South Australia and find out the plants that originally grew in your local area to reinstate these species in your backyard. Plants suitable for butterflies include grasses and sedges, peas, daisies, riceflowers (*Pimelea* spp.), eucalypts, bottlebrushes and banksias.

Outlined below are some important facts to consider:

- Not only is it important to include the correct plant species, but thought must also be given to their location. Butterflies are unable to create their own body heat and rely on warmth from the sun to raise their body temperature and wings for flight. Butterflies also require sun for orientation. Position the key plant foods where they will receive sun from mid-morning to mid-afternoon, which is the peak feeding time for adults. Butterflies are rarely seen feeding in the shade. Flat stones also provide a place in which to get warm and rest.
- Shelter is also an important element of any butterfly garden. Exotic fauna has also had a negative impact on the butterfly population. Therefore, butterflies require shelter from predators to feed and lay eggs.
- Protection is also essential as the delicate wings of butterflies can be easily ripped by strong winds.
- Plant groups of the same species together so that it is more obvious to butterflies and locate tall plants at the back to offer maximum protection from strong winds.
- Butterflies are most active between mid- and late summer. Grow a variety of natives in your garden so that a reliable food source is available throughout the year.
- Spraying chemicals, mowing or slashing can destroy the grasses and sedges on which butterfly and moth larvae are dependant.



The Australian Painted Lady (*Vanessa kershawi*) is a beautiful and welcome visitor to any garden, but remember that butterflies start their lives as caterpillars, so avoid chemical controls and tolerate some leaf loss from their host plants.

Why a Backyard for Wildlife?

In Australia, gardening has been recognised as one of our favourite pastimes and what we do in our home gardens has the potential to benefit or harm the natural environment.

By choosing to develop and maintain a garden that follows the five basic Backyards for Wildlife principles (see below), you can help contribute to a better local environment while at the same time conserve our local flora and fauna, create important habitat, reduce your maintenance costs, and reduce the threat of invasive environmental weeds.

Backyards for Wildlife principles:

1. USE LOCALLY NATIVE PLANTS.
2. USE PLANTS THAT ARE A RANGE OF HEIGHTS.
3. PROVIDE FLOWERS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.
4. MANAGE YOUR PETS RESPONSIBLY.
5. MINIMISE CHEMICAL USE.

Please consider applying some of these principles to your own backyard, so that together we can all help grow a great living environment for Adelaide.

Find Out More

Visit www.backyards4wildlife.com.au to access more Backyards for Wildlife and biodiversity information including an interactive map with lists of what grew in your suburb prior to 1836, a plant database and contact details for specialist native plant nurseries.



Backyards for Wildlife is managed by the SA Department for Environment and Heritage, with support from the Adelaide & Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board and the Australian Government

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