

Richmond birdwing

Bundjalum = butterfly

Scientific name: *Ornithoptera richmondia*.

Common names: Richmond birdwing.

Status: Not listed in NSW.

The Bundjalum (butterfly) is the totem of the Bundjalung people, an indication of the abundance of butterflies once found in the Northern Rivers.

With a wingspan of up to 16 centimetres, the Richmond birdwing butterfly is one of Australia's largest butterflies. The female lays eggs on the underside of leaves of only two native vines: the lowland Richmond birdwing vine (*Pararistolochia praevenosa*) and the mountain aristolochia (*Pararistolochia laheyana*).

Larvae are dependent on the vines for food and caterpillars only leave the vines to develop into pupal and adult stages.

The species was once common from the Mary River in Queensland to the Clarence River in New South Wales and west to the Great Dividing Range. However, since the early 1900s the butterfly's range contracted due to

significant clearing of its preferred rainforest habitat, mainly for agriculture. Also devastating was the release, by the nursery industry, of the exotic Dutchman's pipe vine, which tended to replace the native *Pararistolochia* vines as the preferred host on which females laid their eggs. Unfortunately, eggs laid on the exotic vine species die. Today, the Richmond birdwing butterfly's distribution is fragmented, with the species occurring in two main areas: on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland and, in the south, from Ormeau in Queensland to Wardell in north east New South Wales.

Since 1990, a number of conservation initiatives have helped stabilise populations of the species principally through the cultivation of the feed vines and the restoration of their rainforest habitat.



How you can help:

- Plant the lowland Richmond birdwing vine (*Pararistolochia praevenosa*) and the mountain aristolochia (*Pararistolochia laheyana*) in your garden.

Illustration by Magdi Gregurich, watercolour 2007