

**Species:** Ornithoptera richmondia

**Common name:** Richmond Birdwing Butterfly

**Order:** Lepidoptera

**Family:** Papilionidae (swallowtails)

**Genus:** Ornithoptera



The Richmond Birdwing mainly lives in subtropical rainforest where its larval host plants (*Pararistolochia praevenosa* Richmond Birdwing Vine) grow. Due to urbanisation the habitat of this butterfly is significantly diminished. It was common from Mary River Heads in Qld to the Clarence Rivers in NSW and west to the Great Dividing Range. Today its distribution is fragmented, with the species occurring in two main areas: in the north, from Cootharaba on the Sunshine Coast to near Caboolture and in the south, from Ormeau and Mount Tamborine in the Gold Coast hinterland to Wardell in north-east New South Wales.



The Richmond Birdwing Butterfly is one of Australia's largest butterflies with a wingspan of up to 16cm in females and 13cm in males. Males and females differ in appearance. Females have dark brown or black wings with extensive white, cream or, in the hindwings yellowish markings.



The upper forewing of males is black with a distinctive iridescent green leading edge, white the upper hindwing is predominantly iridescent green with black spots. The underside of the male's forewing is black with extensive green or blue-green markings, whereas the hindwing is largely blue, green and yellow with obvious black spots.



The larvae develops through 5 instars moulting their skins each time. The mature larvae can grow to 58mm long and range from black to pale grey-brown with prominent fleshy spines running along the upper back surface and similar but shorter spines along the outer lower surface. The chrysalis or pup is bright green or bluish-green and is approx. 40mm in length. The larvae are cannibalistic and usually solitary.

The Richmond birdwing lays eggs singly or in small clusters (up to three) on the underside of the native *P. praevanosa* at low to moderate elevations, i.e. <600 m, and the mountain butterfly vine *P. laheyana* at higher elevations >600 m). The eggs are approx. 2mm in diameter. Larvae are entirely dependent upon one or other of these vines for food, only leaving the host plants to complete their development to pupal and then adult stages. The birdwing butterfly vine is only patchily distributed and in low abundance in its natural habitat.

*Pararistolochia praevanosa* is listed as “Near Threatened” under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*, whereas *P. laheyana* is listed as “Least Concern”.

Why not plant a Richmond Birdwing Vine in your garden and help these beautiful native creatures?