

Australian Butterfly Sanctuary
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- #1 Attraction in Kuranda
- Largest butterfly flight aviary & exhibit in Australia
- All-weather experience
- Home to over 2000 native Australian butterflies

MEDIA RELEASE

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CONCERNS ULYSSES BUTTERFLY MAY BECOME EXTINCT

Australian Butterfly Sanctuary has expressed significant concern that the region's iconic Ulysses Butterfly may become extinct, and is calling for Government support and funding before the species disappears completely.

Since the beginning of 2016, the numbers of the unmistakable electric blue butterfly have rapidly decreased in the wild, as well as within private stocks of butterflies.

Observations by experienced butterfly breeders and knowledgeable members of the general public indicate that although Ulysses Butterflies are still being seen in some gardens around the region, overall numbers in the wild have substantially reduced.

Owned and operated by The CaPTA Group, Australian Butterfly Sanctuary has also experienced a complete loss of the species at their Kuranda-based operation.

In the past, the sanctuary reported a 90% success rate in breeding the species, however this rate has plummeted to 0% in recent months and there are currently no Ulysses Butterflies on display.

Senior researchers at James Cook University have begun discussions with the sanctuary to try and understand what is causing the rapid decrease.

Although several theories have been put forward, including environmental stress and infections, research has so far failed to identify the cause, and further research will require significant funding and support.

Australian Butterfly Sanctuary General Manager Mel Nikolich said that the sanctuary had already invested significant time and money into the issue, along with other local breeders.

"To date, the sanctuary has contributed significantly through extra laboratory time and staff wages trying to counter and understand this substantial decrease in numbers, as it affects all of us in the region," she said.

"We have been sharing our findings with other local breeders, but sadly we have yet to determine the cause of the decline."

In addition to the overall decrease in numbers, chances of a naturally-occurring boost in the population have been reduced by the high percentage of male butterflies in the wild.

"If we see a Ulysses in the wild, it's usually a male which only adds to the problem as there are not enough females around to breed," Ms Nikolich said.

James Cook University lecturer Dr Tobin Northfield agreed that action was needed now to prevent extinction of the Ulysses Butterfly.

"One of the keys to avoiding species extinctions is to heed the early warning signs identified by local groups working closely with the species," he said.

"Therefore, it is imperative that we identify the drivers of the problems facing these butterflies now."

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CaPTA Group Director Ben Woodward said government support and funding was essential to understanding why the number of Ulysses Butterflies was dwindling, and to assist in the restoration of the species.

“Our staff have been working tirelessly on this issue since we first became aware of it, however it’s clear that additional assistance and funding is required to prevent the loss of this iconic species,” he said.

“Although the species is considered passive in comparison to other endangered species such as the Southern Cassowary, it would be irresponsible to allow these incredible butterflies to disappear from our region entirely.”

The CaPTA Group has approached the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, and the Hon. Dr Steven Miles, Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef, to request funding and support for the matter.

The CaPTA Group has also requested that the status of the species be changed from ‘least concern wildlife’ to ‘endangered species’ to reflect the rapidly declining numbers, and to promote awareness of the issue.

The CaPTA Group is locally owned & operated by the Woodward family of Cairns, consisting of Rainforestation Nature Park, Tropic Wings Cairns Tours & Charters, Jungle Tours & Trekking, Wildlife Habitat, Cairns ZOOM & Wildlife Dome, Australian Butterfly Sanctuary, ABC Sales & Maintenance and Careers Training Centre.

For more information or to arrange an interview, please contact Communications Manager Caitlin Williams on 0437 724 529 or (07) 4041 9417.