The Miami Blue Butterfly (Cyclargus thomasi bethunebakeri) is a small, brightly colored butterfly found only in Florida. A member of the family Lycaenidae (Gossamer Wings), it is currently listed by the state of Florida as endangered, being extremely limited in both range and numbers. The delicate adults have a wingspan of 0.75-1.10 inches or about the size of a nickel. Males are solid bright blue above. Females are blue with broad dark wing borders and a distinct orange-capped black spot on the hindwing.

Habitat
The Miami blue is primarily a coastal butterfly. It historically inhabited tropical hardwood hammocks and their associated margins, beachside scrub and tropical pine rocklands, where the larvae utilized balloon vine (Cardiospermum corindum) in the soapberry family (Sapindaceae) as the primary host. The Bahia Honda State Park population feeds exclusively on gray nickernbean (Caesalpinia bonduc) in the family Fabaceae. The adults visit a variety of flowers for nectar including Spanish needles, gray nickernbean, snow squaarestem, and scorpion’s-tail.
Life History

Like all butterflies, the Miami blue goes through a life cycle consisting of four distinct developmental stages: egg, larva, pupa, and adult. Females lay the small, pin-head-sized eggs singly on the new growth or developing flowers of gray nickerbean (*Caesalpinia bonduc*). The primarily green, slug-like larvae feed exposed on the vegetation and are often found in association with several species of ants. The larvae secrete small amounts of sugar and carbohydrate-rich droplets from specialized organs on their back, which are feverishly consumed by the ants. In return for the plentiful food rewards, the ants protect their herbivorous companions by aggressively attacking any nearby predators and parasitoids. The Miami blue produces multiple generations each year in south Florida. The adults may be found in all months but are most abundant between April and October.

Similar Butterflies

The Miami blue often occurs in the company of other similar-looking butterflies. It may be easily confused with the much more common ceraunus blue (*Hemiasis ceraunus*) and cassius blue (*Leptotes cassius*). To avoid confusion, careful observation and attention to detail is needed for reliable field identification. The photos to the right provide a visual reference and useful field marks to help distinguish the three butterflies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Miami blue</th>
<th>Ceraunus blue</th>
<th>Cassius blue</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wide white postmedian band</td>
<td>Smaller overall in size than Miami blue</td>
<td>Whitish with numerous tan bands and spots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two prominent black spots, one orange-capped</td>
<td>One prominent black spot outlined in orange</td>
<td>Two black spots outlined in orange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four prominent post-basal black spots</td>
<td>Narrow or diffuse white post-median band</td>
<td>Similar in size to Miami blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males—bright blue above</td>
<td>Males—light blue above</td>
<td>Males—pale lavender-blue above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Checklist of Butterflies of Bahia Honda State Park

The following is a list of butterflies that have been recorded at Bahia Honda State Park. It should be considered a preliminary document and in the years to come, additional species are likely to be reported. Use this checklist to record your observations and share your sightings. Please stick to established park trails when observing or photographing butterflies. Walking on vegetation can do serious damage to sensitive habitats and directly harm plants and other wildlife.

- Great Southern White (*Ascia monuste*)
- Checkered White (*Pontia protodice*)
- Barred Yellow (*Eurema daira*)
- Large Orange Sulphur (*Phoebis agarithe*)
- Lyside Sulphur (*Kricogonia lyside*)
- Amethyst Hairstreak (*Chlorostyrmom maesites*)
- Gray Hairstreak (*Strymon melinus*)
- Mallow Scrub-Hairstreak (*Strymon istapa*)
- Martial Scrub-Hairstreak (*Strymon martialis*)
- Miami Blue (*Cyclargus thomasi*)
- Ammon Blue (*Cyclargus ammon*)
- Ceraunus Blue (*Hemiargus ceraunus*)
- Cassius Blue (*Leptotes cassius*)
- Gulf Fritillary (*Agraulis vanillae*)
- White Peacock (*Anartia jatrophae*)
- Zebra Longwing (*Heliconius charitonius*)
- Mangrove Buckeye (*Junonia evarete*)
- Phaon Crescent (*Phyciades phaon*)
- Monarch (*Danaus plexippus*)
- Queen (*Danaus gilippus*)
- Malachite (*Siproeta stelenes*)
- Long-Tailed Skipper (*Urbanus proteus*)
- Dorantes Skipper (*Urbanus dorantes*)
- Mangrove Skipper (*Phocides pigmallion*)
- Hammock Skipper (*Polygonus lea*)
- Clouded Skipper (*Lerema accius*)
- Three-spotted Skipper (*Cymaenes tripectus*)
- Fiery Skipper (*Hylephila phyleus*)
- Obscure Skipper (*Panoquina panoquinoides*)
- Southern Broken-Dash (*Wallengrenia otha*)
- Whirlabout (*P. vibex*)
Threats

The Miami blue is vulnerable to continued decline and even extinction. Current threats to the butterfly and its potential recovery include habitat loss and fragmentation, population isolation, poor dispersal ability, genetic inbreeding, illegal collection, predation, overuse and improper use of herbicides and insecticides, and impact from weather-related events such as prolonged drought, tropical storms, and hurricanes.

Conservation

Led by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the National Park Service, University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) and McGuire Center for Lepidoptera and Biodiversity, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and the Miami Blue Working Group, cooperative research and recovery efforts are underway to conserve the Miami blue butterfly and help ensure that it remains a regular feature of Florida's diverse environment.

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All photos by Jaret C. Daniels, Ph.D.