

ELTHAM COPPER BUTTERFLY FACTSHEET

OCTOBER
2021



*New Montmorency Station entrance.
Artist impression only, subject to change.*

The Eltham Copper Butterfly (*Paralucia pyrodiscus lucida*) is a small butterfly native to central Victoria. It is recognised by its bright orange-yellow or copper colouring in a unique triangular shape on the tops of its wings and pale brown colour underneath.

The species belongs to the Lycaenidae family of butterfly, the second-largest family of butterflies with over 6000 species worldwide. Many of these species live in limited geographical areas, requiring specific habitats and a symbiotic relationship with ants.

The Eltham Copper Butterfly is listed as endangered under Victoria's *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* and federally under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

Location

The Eltham Copper Butterfly was first discovered around Eltham in 1938 and was thought to be extinct since the 1950s until it was rediscovered in Eltham in 1986. It is only found in three geographic areas of central and western

Victoria. The Eltham area maintains the largest of the few remaining populations of the endangered butterfly.

In late January 2021, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning advised the Hurstbridge Line Duplication project team of a reported sighting of the butterfly within the project area. Prior to this recent sighting, the butterfly had not been seen in Montmorency in over 40 years.



Habitat

The Eltham Copper Butterfly's known habitat is sparse dry woodland. This woodland consists of eucalyptus forests, an understorey of hedges and shrubs as well as native grasses, mosses and leaf litter.



Eltham Copper Butterfly - photo courtesy of Nillumbik Shire Council



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Lifecycle of the Eltham Copper Butterfly

The caterpillars that eventually become the Eltham Copper Butterfly have a close symbiotic relationship with a specific ant from the common *Notoncus* genus, and the shrub Sweet Bursaria (*Bursaria spinosa*) that are all living in this part of Montmorency. The butterfly has a short lifespan and can only complete its lifecycle with the help of the ant.

- 01** Adult butterflies lay their eggs on the roots of the Sweet Bursaria from October to mid November
- 02** Once the eggs hatch, ants guard the caterpillars and lead them to and from the ant colony to feed on the Sweet Bursaria leaves. In return, the ants feed on sugar secretions that are released from the caterpillars' bodies
- 03** Over time the caterpillar changes into a pupa. As the caterpillars pupate, either near or in the ant nest, the ants will guard and protect the pupa from predators
- 04** Pupa transform into adult butterflies from late November to mid January

About the Hurstbridge Line Duplication

The second stage of the Hurstbridge Line Duplication will deliver further improvements, including more train services, less crowding on peak trains and better connections to public transport in Melbourne's north east.

Works include building new modern stations at Greensborough and Montmorency, and duplicating the rail track between Greensborough and Montmorency and between Diamond Creek and Wattle Glen, to allow more trains to run more often. For more information, visit levelcrossings.vic.gov.au

Protecting the Eltham Copper Butterfly

The Level Crossing Removal Project is committed to ensuring the conservation of flora and fauna within its project areas.

As an endangered species, the Eltham Copper Butterfly is protected by federal and state law. We are required to avoid, minimise, and manage impacts to its habitat.

As part of our projects, we carry out extensive environmental investigations prior to starting work on our projects. Investigations by qualified specialists over the last four years did not find any Eltham Copper Butterfly habitat within the Hurstbridge Line Duplication project area. The butterfly may not have been there previously because it needs a very specific set of conditions to survive.

Further ecological investigations have been conducted, including ant surveys

that were sent to the National Museum of Australia for identification. These further investigations confirmed there is an area of habitat for Eltham Copper Butterflies, near where we had planned to duplicate the line, east of Montmorency Station.

Since the butterfly was observed, the habitat has been fenced off and is protected while works continue on other parts of the project.

For more information on the project and design changes following discovery of the Eltham Copper Butterfly, visit our publications page at levelcrossings.vic.gov.au

Further ways to protect the butterfly

Other groups such as government agencies and your local council are working to protect this endangered species and its habitat.

To help protect the butterfly:



Stick to the paths when walking and riding near butterfly habitat



Plant native trees and shrubs in your garden



Try not to damage native plants where the butterfly might live

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