

# Miami Blue

*(Cyclargus thomasi bethunbakeri)*

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The **Miami Blue** (*Cyclargus thomasi bethunbakeri*) is a small, brightly colored butterfly nearly endemic to South Florida. It was once locally common across much of the South Florida mainland and adjacent coastal barrier islands south through the Florida Keys to the Dry Tortugas. Habitat loss and fragmentation associated with expanding coastal development over the last several decades led to a catastrophic decline in the butterfly's overall range. Today, the Miami Blue is currently restricted to only two or three small remaining remote island populations within the Key West and Great White Heron National Wildlife Refuges, making it one of the most critically endangered insects in North America.

The butterfly currently inhabits beachside scrub in close association with its two common larval host plants, Florida Keys Blackbead (*Pithecellobium keyense*) and Gray Nickerbean (*Caesalpinia bonduc*). The tiny, slug-like larvae are regularly tended by ants which provide protection from various insect predators in return for sugary food rewards. Collaborative conservation and recovery efforts are underway for the Miami Blue butterfly. They include regular population monitoring, captive breeding, organism reintroduction and scientific research.

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Cover photo by: Jaret Daniels

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