

Reintroducing Miami Blues

by Dennis Olle

In November, 2002, the State of Florida, responding to a petition from NABA, designated Miami Blues as an endangered species. Since that emergency listing and the subsequent confirmation of endangered status, efforts to protect the butterflies have been moving forward with reasonably good speed; however, there have been some recent “bumps” in the road.

A propagation program for Miami Blues, directed by Dr. Jaret Daniels at the University of Florida, Gainesville and funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Commission, was begun in the latter half of 2003. The captive breeding program was intended to provide a reservoir of individuals should a disaster strike the last remaining wild colony at Bahia Honda Key, and to provide breeding stock that could be used for reintroducing Miami Blues to locations where they formerly thrived but at which they no longer occur. Initial propagation efforts have been reported to be highly successful. Through 2005, twenty-four generations of Miami Blues, including more than 20,000 viable pupas and almost 13,000 adults have been reared. However, transferring these laboratory successes to successful reintroductions in the field is, at best, problematic.

The first attempts at field reintroductions, during the “wet season” (May-Oct) of 2004, were limited to one site in Biscayne National Park (Elliott Key) and to more than a half dozen other sites in the Flamingo area of Everglades National Park. These initial attempts at reintroducing Miami Blues to the wild were mainly limited to releasing laboratory-raised caterpillars, although in a few cases pregnant



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A Nectaring Miami Blue. Sept. 24, 2005. Bahia Honda State Park, Monroe Co., FL.

adult females were released. Both Elliott Key and the Flamingo area contain extensive stands of gray nickerbean (*Caesalpinia bonduc*). Follow-up surveys, at the release sites later in 2004, found a small number of adults.

More recent developments (or the lack thereof) in the field have not been as encouraging: So far as I am aware, there have no attempts to create suitable habitat for Miami Blues very close to the existing colony, allowing them to increase their range naturally. In addition, as of this writing, releases have not been re-commenced in the 2005 wet season.

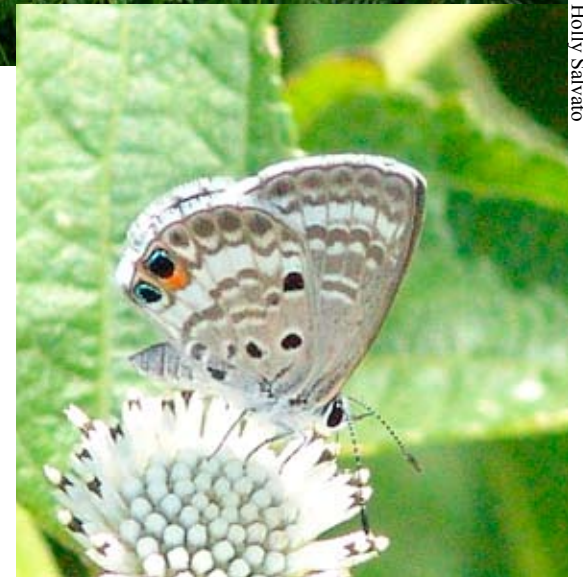
The Florida Keys Mosquito Control District (“FKMCD”) has successfully stalled efforts aimed at restoring Miami Blues anywhere in the Florida Keys (Monroe Co.). FKMCD initiated a legal action against the State of Florida and the University of Florida, et al., seeking to enjoin them from releasing any Miami Blues into the Florida Keys. While no injunction against releasing Miami Blues has been granted in the action, for all practical purposes, the FKMCD appears to have gotten its way as the State has refused to proceed with any re-introduction in the Keys in the face of this opposition.



David Lysinger

The argument of the FKMCD is they need to spray pesticides throughout the Keys and that the presence of an endangered species will interfere with their duties. Using this reasoning to block the release of Miami Blues onto northern Key Largo, for example, seems illogical, since this area already contains populations of the federally endangered Schaus’ Swallowtail and thus cannot legally be sprayed.

Notwithstanding the initial propagation successes, we have learned that there is an insufficient number of caterpillars available to re-commence timely 2004-type releases into the wild this year. Surprisingly, despite these limited numbers, the staff of the Florida Wildlife & Conservation Commission (FWC), trying to meet objections from the FKMCD, has elected to begin a pesticide study subjecting captive-raised Miami Blues, in various life stages, to chemicals commonly sprayed over natural areas to kill adult mosquitoes (adulticides). We assume that the conclusion following the sacrifice of these rare creatures is foregone: Diabrom (the adulticide used by



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Top: The reintroduction sites, such as this site near Flamingo, in Everglades National Park, have ample amounts of gray nickerbean, the caterpillar foodplant for the Miami Blues.

Above: Another nectaring Miami Blue. Sept. 24, 2005. Bahia Honda State Park, Monroe Co., FL.