

Lycaenidae family

Fringed Heath-blue

Neolucia agricola agricola

Also known as: Fringed Blue

Abundance in Adelaide area: Uncommon

Flight: Oct – mid Dec

Wingspan: m 20mm; f 21 mm

Mature larva length: 11–13 mm

This attractive bronze-brown Lycaenid is found near areas of native vegetation, where it breeds on various native legumes. Try growing some of these caterpillar food plants in your garden, especially if you live near existing habitat. The single annual flight period lasts a little over a month, starting in late October and peaking in late November.

Caterpillar food plants: Small Bush-peas.

The caterpillars eat buds and flowers of food plants.

Adelaide native species: Showy Parrot-pea (*Dillwynia sericea*), Mallee Bush-pea (*Eutaxia microphylla*), Bristly Bush-pea (*Pultenaea acerosa*), Dense Bush-pea (*Pultenaea densifolia*), Twiggy Bush-pea (*Pultenaea largiflorens*), Narrow-leaf Bush-pea (*Pultenaea tenuifolia*).

The Fringed Heath-blue passes most of the year as an egg. It only flies for a relatively short period through late October until early December, when it may be observed over a wide area of the state, but rarely in numbers. It will generally be found in heathy bush remnants and in heathy areas of national parks throughout the Adelaide Hills and adjacent areas.

The butterflies are small and at a glance unremarkable in their appearance; however, when examined closely they have a certain understated elegance. Both sexes are brown on their upper side, with a defined dark brown



and white chequered fringe to the wings. When viewed in sunlight, the males exhibit a slight iridescent sheen to the brown colour.

On the underside, the background colour is a pale brown with slightly darker brown lozenge shaped markings, which are outlined in white on the forewing. The hind wing also has a pale brown background colour, which is patterned with dark and mid brown patches, as well as areas of white.

The caterpillars of this butterfly are very variable in colour, being either green, brown or orange-red with a darker red-brown band edged with white running down the back. The body is covered in fine hairs that emerge from tiny, raised, coloured bases, giving a stippled appearance. While the caterpillars may sound brightly coloured, in fact they are wonderfully camouflaged. They are incredibly difficult to see when feeding on the colourful flower buds of their food plants.

