

## Lycaenidae family

## Wattle Blue

*Theclinesthes miskini miskini***Also known as:** Miskin's Blue**Abundance in Adelaide area:** Rare**Flight:** Oct–May**Wingspan:** m 22 mm; f 22 mm**Mature larva length:** 12–13 mm

The Wattle Blue is rare in the suburbs but can be locally common in the Adelaide Hills. It breeds on Acacias and likes the presence of ants. These ants attend the larvae.

**Caterpillar food plants:** Usually wattles. The caterpillars eat new leaf growth.

**Adelaide native species:** Golden Wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*).

**Other South Australian species:** Elegant Wattle (*Acacia victoriae* ssp. *victoriae*).

While common in northern areas of the state, the Wattle Blue is far rarer in the Adelaide region. As its name suggests, the caterpillars of this species feeds upon various Wattle species. The adults are normally seen flying close to areas that have large stands of its caterpillar food plants, with the males being attracted to flowering shrubs and prominent high points, such as hill tops, small isolated trees, etc., around which they fly rapidly.

The males are a mid violet-blue in colour on the upper side. The females tend to be a little more blue in colour, with broad brown margins and have a prominent black spot positioned near the tail.

Underneath, the background colour is greyish-brown. There are slightly darker, descending, transverse brown markings edged in white on both wings. Between two spots, a small tail is



produced from the outer margin of the wing. This eyespot and tail are common in many blue butterflies throughout the world. It creates the appearance of an artificial 'head' which induces predators to attack the wrong end of the butterfly, tearing the wings, but leaving the insect alive.

The oval shaped caterpillar is well camouflaged on the flower buds and on the new foliage of the Wattles it feeds on. It can be green, yellow or purple-brown—even red caterpillars have been noted. It has a darker band down the back, edged in yellow.

The ovate pupa is pale brown mottled with darker brown. It is hidden in cracks in the trunks of the wattle tree hosts or in leaf litter caught in branch forks or surrounding the host plant.

Although the butterfly is not common in the Adelaide area, the Wattle host plants will attract several other more common butterflies and may also attract this species.

