

### Browns and xenicas

The browns and xenicas are orange and brown butterflies that breed on native and introduced grasses. The common brown, of medium to large size, is often seen in Perth's hills in late spring to autumn. The western xenica and the marbled xenica are common in Perth's bushland in spring. If you live near where these butterflies occur, you can entice them to breed in your garden by planting local native grasses.

### Spotted jezebel

This is one of the larger Perth butterflies, brightly coloured on the underside, in red, yellow, black and white. The caterpillars feed on mistletoes, such as those that grow on salt sheoak (*Casuarina obesa*) or on some of the eastern Australian wattles grown in Perth's eastern suburbs. They also feed on plants in the sandalwood family, such as sandalwood (*Santalum spicatum*) and quandong (*Santalum acuminatum*). Quandong is native to Perth; sandalwood occurs in the Wheatbelt and beyond.

### Introduced butterflies

There are several species of butterfly that are often seen around Perth that are introduced from elsewhere. It is not a conservation priority to provide these species with food plants, but you may see them around as your garden becomes more fauna-friendly.

### Cabbage white

Often incorrectly called the cabbage moth, the cabbage white is common and will be found wherever members of the cabbage family (*Brassica*) are grown. It will also lay its eggs on nasturtiums.

### Monarch (or wanderer)

The wanderer was first recorded in WA in 1897 and is one of the largest butterflies found here. The

caterpillars feed on milkweeds (family Asclepiadaceae), some of which are noxious weeds. *Asclepias curassavica* is suitable to grow in gardens.

### Palm-darts

Two species of skipper from Queensland have become established in Perth: the orange palm-dart, marked in orange and brown, and the yellow palm-dart, marked in yellow and brown. These are butterflies of medium size, larger than any of the local skippers. As their name implies, their caterpillars feed on palms introduced to Perth.

Although not local to Perth, these butterflies are of biological value. Their caterpillars are food for birds, lizards, spiders and other animals. Moreover, the shelters they make, by joining together pieces of palm frond, provide homes for spiders and insects.

### Obtaining local plants

Many of the plant species mentioned in this brochure are local plants — that is, those that evolved and grow naturally in the local area. They are the plants that the local animal species, including butterflies, have evolved with and hence are most attracted to and find most useful. A trip to your local nursery is unlikely to reveal many of these plants for sale. Some specialist nurseries do, however, carry a range of local plants. Contact the Swan Catchment Centre for details of those in your area.

### Useful books

Hay, R.W., Houston, T.F., Williams, A.A.E. and Williams M.R.[1994], *Bring Back the Butterflies*, WA Museum.

Powell, R. and J. Emberson (1996) *Growing Locals*, Western Australian Naturalists Club.

Powell, R. (1990), *Leaf and Branch: Trees and Tall Shrubs of Perth*, Department of Conservation and Land Management, Perth.

*The Swan Catchment Centre acknowledges and thanks Rosemary Glass (BICM), Jill Harris (Write Environment), Robert Powell, Eric McCrum, Phyllis Robertson and Jane Emberson for their contributions to this brochure.*

Swan Catchment  
Centre

# BUTTERFLIES

## Fauna Friendly Gardening

*The bright colours and dancing flight of butterflies can bring joy and colour to any garden. Butterflies are the world's most popular invertebrates and the sight of them can truly lift the spirit.*

*South-western Australia is not rich in native butterfly species and many of those that we do have are becoming less common, particularly in Perth. The clearing of native vegetation is the principal cause of this decline in numbers. The addition of suitable local plant species into urban gardens can significantly help conserve native butterflies as well as many other insects and animals.*

*About half of Perth's commoner butterfly species are blues or skippers, which are quite small, with a wingspan of only 2-3 cm. The blues have some blue colouring on their wings, but appear greyish in flight or with their wings folded at rest. The skippers are brownish or orange and have a jerky or darting flight.*

*Some species of butterfly are present all year round; others appear at a particular season, especially in spring.*

### What attracts butterflies?

The life cycle of butterflies is well known — egg to caterpillar to pupa to adult. It is perhaps less clearly understood that adult butterflies and their caterpillar larvae have very different requirements. For butterflies to breed successfully in your garden, you need to meet the needs of the caterpillar. Generally speaking, caterpillars eat the leaves of particular plants and a female will only lay eggs on an appropriate food plant. These vary from one species of butterfly to another and, in some species, comprise only one or two closely related plants.



Painted Lady  
Photo by Robert Powell



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## Fauna Friendly Gardening

Adult butterflies sip nectar from flowers. These include Australian plants such as *Grevillea crithmifolia*, *Pimelea ferruginea*, Geraldton wax (*Chamelaucium uncinatum*), grasstrees (*Xanthorrhoea spp.*) and plants in the genera *Melaleuca*, *Leptospermum*, *Baeckea* and *Thryptomene*; and such exotic plants as butterfly bush (*Buddleia spp.*) and lantana.

Adult butterflies may visit your garden if you have their food source growing, but they will lay eggs and breed only if you provide a caterpillar food source. These food plants on which caterpillars feed are far more important than nectar plants for butterfly conservation, since they are the plants that allow butterflies to breed.

In Perth, a good start to attracting native butterflies to your garden is to plant coojong (*Acacia saligna*), green stinkwood (*Jacksonia sternbergiana*) and, if near the coast, red-eyed wattle (*Acacia cyclops*).

Native grasses, such as tall spear-grass (*Austrostipa flavescens*) and feather spear-grass (*Austrostipa elegantissima*) will allow butterflies such as skippers and browns to breed.

### Attracting different species

#### Australian painted lady

This lively, medium-sized butterfly is, at times, quite common in Perth, particularly in spring and sometimes in autumn. It is brightly coloured, in orange, black and white. The butterflies often arrive in Perth from the Wheatbelt, where they breed on capeweed. Providing nectar plants will attract them to your garden. They may breed in your garden if you grow native everlasting daisies.

#### Lesser wanderer

This is one of the larger of Perth's butterflies and is coloured orange, brown, black and white. It is closely related to the introduced monarch. Its larvae feed on milkweeds, particularly *Leichardtia australia* and *Ischnostemma carnosum*.

#### Blues (family Lycaenidae)

The wings of these tiny dainty butterflies have bluish colouring above, brownish below. One of the commoner species is the pea-blue. The male is purplish-blue above and the female has pale blue patches; both are straw-coloured below. The pea-blue breeds on the buds, flowers and pods of many plants in the pea family. A favourite is the local green stinkwood (*Jacksonia sternbergiana*); other

species to grow include yellow-eyed flame-pea (*Chorizema dicksonii*) and native wisteria (*Hardenbergia*).

Other blues include the common grass-blue, which, like the pea-blue, breeds on pea plants; the two-spotted line-blue (on wattles), the saltbush blue (on saltbushes), and the brilliant satin azure (on mistletoes).

A further species of blue is the stunningly beautiful and rare western jewel. This species has very specific requirements. It will lay eggs on only a few different species of local native shrub, including green stinkwood (*Jacksonia sternbergiana*), rattlepods (*Daviesia divaricata*) and the wattle *Acacia xanthina*. The real difficulty with breeding western jewels, however, is that they also require a particular species of ant (*Crematogaster perthensis*) to have a nest at the base of the plant, as the caterpillars live inside the ants' nest during the day.

#### Yellow admiral

This striking species is usually scarce in Perth. It is, however, a powerful flier and very mobile, and one of the easier species to attract to the garden if you have a healthy mass of one of its food plants

growing: native pellitory (*Parietaria debilis* or *Parietaria cardiostegia*), stinging-nettle (*Urtica urens*) or babies' tears (*Soleirolia soleirolii*). Native pellitory, an annual, is readily eaten by snails. It is best grown in a large tub, with snail-deterrent sprinkled at its base. (Choose a product that is not toxic to lizards.)

The butterflies lay their eggs mostly in winter or early spring. You can tell when they have visited — the young caterpillars make sack-like shelters by bending down the sides of the leaves. The caterpillars themselves are best seen at night, with a torch.

#### Skippers

Skippers are a group of small butterflies with a characteristic fast, jerky flight. The most common native species in Perth is the white-banded grass-dart, a tiny orange and brown butterfly, which breeds on native and introduced grasses. Another species that breeds on grasses is the wedge grass-skipper, which appears in the autumn. The lovely silver-chequered ochre occurs near the coast, where it breeds on prickly lily (*Acanthocarpus preissii*). Two larger, Queensland species of skipper that have become established in Perth are mentioned over the page.



Eggs of Spotted Jezebel  
Photo by Robert Powell



Pupa of Yellow Admiral  
Photo by Robert Powell



White-banded Grassdart  
Photo by Robert Powell



Spotted Jezebel Laying Eggs on Quandong  
Photo by Robert Powell

## BUTTERFLIES

