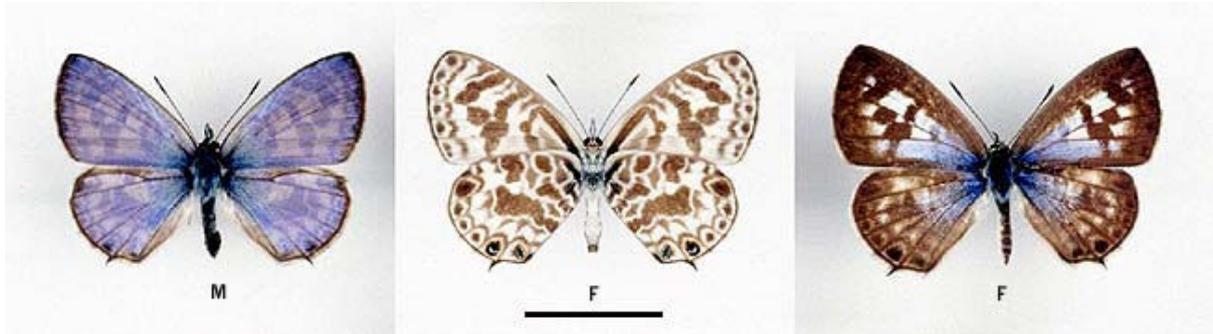


SOUTH AUSTRALIAN BUTTERFLIES

Data Sheet

Leptotes plinius pseudocassius (Murray) (Plumbago or Zebra Blue)



Interesting aspects: The native hostplant for this species is *Plumbago zeylanica* (White Leadwort), which grows in tropical and subtropical areas of Australia. However, the butterfly has adapted to the introduced blue flowering garden plant *Plumbago auriculata* (Common Plumbago), which will grow in temperate conditions. Consequently the butterfly is gradually extending its range southwards via the urban habitat. It is likely to be only a matter of time before the butterfly makes it to Adelaide, either by way of the Murray Valley or by accidental introduction on potted *Plumbago* reared in the eastern state nurseries. The butterfly is also reported to be present at Alice Springs in the Northern Territory.

The butterfly is usually observed flying around its *Plumbago* host plants.

The early stages and their habits are similar to *Zizina labradus*

Life History

Larval food-host: *Plumbago* species including **P. auriculata* (Plumbaginaceae). The native hostplant for this butterfly is *Plumbago zeylanica* (White Leadwort), which grows in tropical and subtropical areas of Australia, but has not been recorded from northern South Australia although it does occur naturally just across the border in the Northern Territory. The larvae eat the flowers and flower buds of the host plants. They are also known to be cannibalistic eating newly formed soft pupae when their natural food source is scarce.

Larval attendant ant: Larvae are sometimes attended by a few small ants.

Eggs: Laid singly on the flower buds of the hostplant.

Larvae: The final instar is onisciform (slater shaped), about 12 mm long, polymorphic coloured in some shade of green or pink, with a darker mid dorsal line and other darker markings. Larvae remain exposed on the host plant.

Pupae: Short cylindrical, rounded anteriorly and posteriorly, about 8 mm long, mostly smooth with a few short bristles. Usually brown coloured with darker markings. Weakly attached to the silked substrate by anal hooks and a central girdle, usually to the stems on the hostplant just below the flowering spike upon which the larva was last feeding.

Flight period: The flight of the butterfly coincides with the flowering of its *Plumbago* host plants, which is most of the year in hot, humid areas, but in summer and autumn in cooler areas. In Sydney the flight usually occurs from late summer through autumn, while at Alice Springs it has been recorded flying in May. Reported to overwinter as eggs in cooler areas.

Distribution: Normally a tropical to subtropical butterfly, but it has been gradually extending its range southwards into urban areas along the eastern seaboard of Australia. The butterfly has yet to be observed in South Australia, but does occur in the damp areas of the MacDonnell Ranges and Alice Springs region of the Northern Territory where the winters can be cold and so the butterfly should not have problem with adapting to South Australian conditions.

Habitat: Its native *Plumbago* foodplants occur in higher rainfall woodland habitat with assured access to water. The butterfly is now generally considered to be an urban butterfly along the coastal and near coastal areas of Queensland and New South Wales.

Conservation Status: Locally common in urban areas along the eastern seaboard of Queensland and New South Wales.

Threats: No major threats.

Conservation Strategy: None required.

Author: R. GRUND, © copyright 5 August 2004, all rights reserved.