



U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office

Conserving the Biological Diversity of the Great Basin, Eastern Sierra, and Mojave Desert

Questions and Answers

- Proposed listing of the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly as endangered
- Proposed listing of the Lupine blue butterfly, Reakirt's blue butterfly, Spring Mountains icarioides blue butterfly, and two Spring Mountains dark blue butterflies as threatened

September 26, 2012

Q. What is the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly?

A. The Mt. Charleston blue butterfly (*Plebejus shasta charlestonensis*) (formerly in the genus *Icaricia*) is a distinctive subspecies of the wider ranging Shasta blue butterfly (*Plebejus shasta*), a member of the family Lycaenidae. The wingspan of the Mt. Charleston blue ranges from $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inch. Males' wings are dark to dull iridescent blue and females are brown with a blue overlay. The undersides of their wings are gray, with a pattern of black spots, brown blotches and pale wing veins to give it a mottled appearance.

Q. Where is the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly located?

A. The Mt. Charleston blue butterfly is known only to occur at the high elevations of the Spring Mountains (approximately 6,000 – 11,500 feet above sea level), in the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, approximately 25 miles west of Las Vegas in Clark County, Nev. The butterfly requires open forest habitats that support its larval host plant, Torrey's milkvetch (*Astragalus calycosus* var. *calycosus*). Currently, the butterfly is known to occupy only two of its 16 historical locations, while it is presumed the butterfly occupies another eight of those historical sites. The butterfly is extirpated from the remaining six locations, which means none have been seen in those areas within 20 years. A location is presumed occupied when there are sightings of the butterfly and, therefore, there is a potential for diapausing larvae to exist. Diapause is a period of suspended growth or development similar to hibernation.

Q. Has the population of Mt. Charleston Blue butterfly declined?

A. Yes. Based on monitoring project surveys, the petition, and discussions with recognized Mt. Charleston blue butterfly experts, it appears the population has been declining since 1995. Based on the best available information, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has determined these declines in distribution and abundance are a result of natural and human-caused factors.

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Q. When the Service issued the 12-month finding for the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly in March 2011, the agency recommended listing the butterfly; however the action was precluded because the Service had other priority work to complete. Did the delay hurt the Mt. Charleston blue's chances of survival?

A. There is no evidence to suggest the delay pushed the butterfly toward extinction. If the butterfly had been in such deep peril in March 2011, the Service would have taken emergency listing actions at that time. The subspecies became a candidate for Endangered Species Act (ESA) protection when the 12-month finding was published. Inclusion on the candidate list promoted cooperative conservation efforts for the butterfly with the U.S. Forest Service and other entities. The efforts included surveys, life history studies, and habitat protection and restoration activities. Additionally, the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly, along with more than 50 other animal and plant species endemic to the Spring Mountains, was included in a 1998 Conservation Agreement for the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area signed by the Service, the State of Nevada, and the U.S. Forest Service. In 2000, the 50-plus species, including the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly, were incorporated as covered species under the Clark County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan.

Q. The original petition from the Urban Wildlands Group only sought ESA protection for the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly. Why is the Service proposing to list the five additional butterflies as threatened?

A. The five additional butterflies are proposed for listing as threatened because they closely resemble the Mt. Charleston blue and they overlap into the blue's habitat. The differences between all five butterflies are subtle and undetectable to the untrained eye. The five butterflies the Service is recommending for listing as threatened are the Lupine blue butterfly (*Plebejus lupini texanus*), Reakirt's blue butterfly (*Echinargus isola*), Spring Mountains icarioides blue butterfly (*Plebejus icarioides austinorum*), and two Spring Mountains dark blue butterflies (*Euphilotes ancilla cryptica* & *Euphilotes ancilla purpura*). Only populations of the five butterflies that occur within the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly's habitat are proposed for listing as threatened.

Q. What are the main threats to the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly?

A. Threats contributing to the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly's decline include: (1) The loss and degradation of habitat due to fire suppression and succession, implementation of recreation development projects and fuels reduction projects, and increases in nonnative plants; (2) inadequate regulatory mechanisms to prohibit collection of the butterfly; and (3) extreme precipitation events and drought, which are likely to become more frequent under climate change.

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Q. Is the Service proposing to designate critical habitat for the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly?

A. The agency is not designating critical habitat for the subspecies at this time. Proposing critical habitat requires publication of detailed maps and location descriptions. The Service is concerned that designation of critical habitat would more widely announce the exact locations of the butterflies to poachers and collectors — inviting unauthorized collection and trade, and exposing the area to increased impacts from public use.

Q. Does the public or any interested party have the opportunity to comment on the proposed listing actions?

A. Yes. The Service requests comments or information from the public, other concerned governmental agencies, Native American tribes, the scientific community, industry, or any other interested parties. The specific types of information the Service is seeking are described in the proposal document.

Publication of the proposed listing actions opens a 60-day comment period. Anyone wishing to submit information regarding the proposals may do so by the following methods:

- Federal eRulemaking Portal: www.regulations.gov. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.
- U.S. mail or hand-delivery: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R8-ES-2012-0069; *Division of Policy and Directives Management*; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203.

Emails and faxes will not be accepted, and all information received at www.regulations.gov will be posted. This generally means the Service will post any personal information provided. Comments must be electronically submitted or postmarked no later than November 26, 2012.

The listing proposals are available on the Internet at <http://www.regulations.gov> (Docket Number FWS-R8-ES-2012-0069) and at <http://www.fws.gov/nevada/>. Supporting documents used in preparing this finding are available for inspection by appointment, during normal business hours at the Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office in Las Vegas at 4701 North Torrey Pines Drive, telephone 702/515-5230, facsimile 702/515-5231.

Q. Will the Service hold public hearings on the listing proposals?

A. While the ESA provides for one or more public hearings on the proposals, if requested, the Service can hold a hearing(s) without being requested to do so. Requests must be in writing and sent to the above address no later than November 13, 2012. If a public hearing(s) is scheduled, the Service will announce the date(s), time(s), and location(s) at least 15 days in advance.

For more information, contact Edward D. Koch, State Supervisor, Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office, by mail to 4701 N. Torrey Pines Drive, Las Vegas, NV 89130; by telephone at 775-861-6300; or by facsimile at 775-861-6301. Those using a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) can call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 800-877-8339.

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