

## Lycaenidae family

## Genoveva Azure

*Ogyris genoveva***Also known as:** Southern Purple Azure**Abundance in Adelaide area:** Uncommon**Flight:** Dec – mid Mar**Wingspan:** m 47 mm; f 53 mm**Mature larva length:** 30–32 mm

This spectacular Blue butterfly breeds mainly on the Box Mistletoe (*Amyema miquelii*) that is a common parasite of a number of Eucalyptus species, especially Blue Gum, Pink Gum, Manna Gum and Stringybarks. They may be seen near the trees on which they are breeding. Males sometimes gather to fly rapidly on nearby hilltops.

**Caterpillar food plants:** Mistletoes (*Amyema* spp.) The caterpillars eat the flowers and leaves.

**Adelaide native species:** Box Mistletoe (*Amyema miquelii*) on Eucalyptus species and Drooping Mistletoe (*Amyema pendula* ssp. *pendula*) on Stringybark Eucalypts and Blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*).

One of a group of large Blue butterflies known as 'Azures', this spectacular butterfly is very rarely seen. Although it occurs throughout the Adelaide Hills, it flies around the top of tall Eucalypt trees that host the mistletoes its caterpillars feed upon.

When not flying around the tops of these trees it perches high in the branches, where it sits with its wings tightly closed above its back.

The upper side of the wings is a deep purple-blue in the male and a blue-green colour, with black borders and a yellow patch towards the tip of the fore-wings in the female; the underside of the wings is very similar in appearance to the bark of the trees it lives around.



The Genoveva Azure has a complex life history, which is strongly associated with the common orange and black Sugar-ant (*Camponotus consobrinus*). The caterpillar feeds upon the Box and Drooping Mistletoes (*Amyema miquelii* and *A. pendula*) that grow upon tall Eucalypt tree hosts, but there must be a colony of the ants, either nesting at the base of the tree or very close nearby.

During the day the caterpillars live within the ant nest, or under bark at the base of the tree. They always have a retinue of ants attending them. At night the ants accompany the caterpillars to the mistletoes growing in the branches of the tree, providing them with some protection from parasites and predators. The ants 'milk' a pair of organs at the rear end of the caterpillar for honey dew. The caterpillars are pinkish and yellow-brown with small black spots and some white fringing hairs.

