



**By Brian Sams**

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## Cycad Blue Butterfly - Fact Sheet

The Cycad Blue Butterfly is starting to cause major damage to Cycads and in particular the Japanese cycad, *Cycas revoluta*, in our part of the world. Usually the first sign is cycad plants displaying significant damage as pictured below.



*Image Brian Sams Wattletree Horticultural Services.*

The butterfly is actually quite interesting and beautiful. These butterflies have pale brown wings, with a metallic blue or purple sheen, and a wingspan of 25-30mm. They have eye patterns of orange and black on the margin of hindwings, and each has a little tail attached. They lay white to pale blue eggs on the soft new leaves. Eggs are distinctly disc shaped. These hatch to produce caterpillars that are specialised to eat cycads of different types. This is actually an Australian native butterfly and it has certainly got a taste for the Japanese cycad or sago palm. The caterpillars hatch to coincide with the production of soft new fronds each spring and devour them. Once the leaves have fully expanded and put on their tough waxy layer they are rarely bothered.



Cycad Blue Butterfly – image [www.pacsoa.org.au](http://www.pacsoa.org.au)

The caterpillars are green when they hatch, but become dark brown as they grow older and tend to hide under the leaves and in the crown, and feed mainly at night which makes them hard to spot. In fact the images below were taken in Darwin a few years ago and were around 5 in the afternoon in the heat of the day so if they are hungry they will eat!



*Image Brian Sams Wattletree Horticultural Services.*

## Control methods

If you want to control these creatures the time to do it is while the caterpillars are active.

- Clean away as much leaf litter and muck from around the crown to limit the number of hiding places
- Make up an insecticide – a good safe one is the biological insecticide Dipel and add a wetting agent to help the spray stick. You could also use Yates Success as a safe alternative.
- Spray on both sides of the leaves and in particular under the leaves
- Spray well now and every week or so till the leaves harden up

If you are growing Cycads you should look carefully when new fronds are about to emerge each year (which in southern Queensland is in December or January) and take action if you see either damage or the butterfly.



*Image Brian Sams Wattletree Horticultural Services.*

