



## 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 Mt. Charleston Blue Butterfly 12-Month Finding

March 7, 2011

### 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 are dark to dull iridescent blue and females are brown with a blue overlay. Their underside is 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 only occurs at high elevations (approximately 6,000 – 11,500 feet above sea level) primarily on the east side of the Spring Mountains in the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, approximately 25 miles west of Las Vegas in Clark County, Nevada. The butterfly requires habitats that support its larval host plant, Torrey's milkvetch (*Astragalus calycosus* var. *calycosus*).

### 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 gradually 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. The butterfly is presumed extirpated (no longer present) from 6 of the 15 known locations or occurrences. Current estimates indicate the butterfly persistently occupies less than 23 acres of habitat in Upper Kyle and Lee canyons. Some butterflies were observed during surveys conducted in July and August of 2010, yet the population appears to be extremely low. Additional surveys are planned for 2011 in Upper Kyle and Lee canyons to monitor population status and trends for the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly.

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**Q. Why did the Service complete a 12-month finding under the Endangered Species Act for the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly?**

**A.** The Service completed a 12-month finding in response to a petition filed in October 2005, from The Urban Wildlands Group, Inc., requesting that the Service list the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly as a threatened or endangered species under the emergency listing provision of the Endangered Species Act. The Service completed an initial review, or 90-day finding, on May 30, 2007, and concluded that the petition contained substantial information supporting the Service to complete this in-depth review (known as a 12-month finding) of the butterfly's status.

**Q. What were the results of the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly 12-month finding?**

**A.** In addition to the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly's limited range and small population size, threats to the butterfly 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; and (3) extreme precipitation events and drought, which are likely to become more frequent under climate change. Because of these threats, the Service determined the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly should be listed as threatened or endangered throughout its entire range.

**Q. Why did the Service reach a warranted but precluded determination for the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly?**

**A.** In making this determination, the Service completed the 12-month finding, and found sufficient scientific and commercial data indicating that listing the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly as threatened or endangered throughout its range is warranted. However, the Service is precluded from beginning work immediately on a listing proposal because the agency's limited resources must be devoted to other, higher priority listing actions. We assigned the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly a Listing Priority Number of 3, which is the highest priority rank possible for a subspecies under the Service's current guidance for adding species to the Lists of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants.

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**Q. Does this finding protect the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly under the Act?**

A. The Mt. Charleston blue butterfly will be added to the list of candidate species eligible for Endangered Species Act protection. While candidate species receive no statutory protection under the Act, inclusion on the candidate list promotes cooperative conservation efforts for these species. The Service's goal is to assist Federal, State, and private conservation partners in designing and implementing actions that are targeted at reducing or removing threats to the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly and other at-risk species. 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. A variety of conservation measures have been implemented to benefit endemic species in the Spring Mountains since 1998; however, until recently, relatively few conservation actions were taken to prevent the decline of the butterfly. Given the status of the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly, the Service will continue to work closely with the Forest Service and other entities to promote cooperative conservation efforts for this subspecies, including surveys, life history studies, and habitat protection and restoration activities.

**Q. Does the public or any interested party have the opportunity to comment on the 12-month finding?**

A. Yes. The Service requests that interested parties submit any new information on the status of and threats to the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly as the information becomes available. Natural history and distribution information, in particular, will help us monitor and focus habitat conservation efforts for this subspecies. We intend that any proposed listing action for the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly will be as accurate as possible. Therefore, we will continue to accept additional information and comments concerning this finding from all concerned governmental agencies, the scientific community, industry, or any other interested party.

**Q. Where can more information about the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly including copies of the 12-month finding be found?**

A. This finding is available on the Internet at <http://www.regulations.gov> and <http://www.fws.gov/nevada/>. Supporting documents used in preparing this finding are available for inspection by appointment, during normal business hours, at the Service's Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office, 4701 North Torrey Pines Drive, Las Vegas, NV, 89130; telephone (702) 515-5230; facsimile (702) 515-5231. Please submit any new information, materials, comments, or questions concerning this finding to the above address or fax.

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