



Cairns Birdwing

These highly coloured butterflies are the largest that fly around the wetlands. Females are black, yellow and white with red patches behind their neck. They can have a wingspan of over 15 cm. Males are slightly smaller (around 13 cm) and are iridescent green, yellow and black. Also common after the wet season they are short lived and must find a mate quickly. Females lay eggs on the Native Dutchman's Pipe Vine (*Aristolochia tagala*) and the greedy caterpillars develop rapidly. At maturity, these large black caterpillars have distinctive long pointed orange and black tipped spines.

Butterflies

With extensive plantings of numerous food and host trees, colourful butterflies are plentiful around Cattana Wetlands. Two of the iconic butterflies of tropical Queensland, the Ulysses and Cairns Birdwing, can be easily seen at Cattana Wetlands on a sunny day at the right time of year.

Ulysses Butterfly

These beautiful and distinctive swallowtail butterflies fly around the wetlands with a distinctive blue flash. This effect is created by the opening and closing of their large wings (they have a wingspan that can be over 10 cm), that are brilliant, metallic blue on top and dark brown below. They are especially abundant after the wet season and females lay eggs on particular trees from the genus Melicope, such as Pink Euodia.



The Air Force

Dragonflies

Watch for several species of dragonflies zooming over the water lilies of the wetland on a warm sunny day. Dragonflies are amazing creatures. They are fast, manoeuvrable and have excellent endurance and eyesight. This makes them fantastic predators and they catch their prey (usually flying insects) while flying. They also mate on the wing and while locked together the female will lay a string of eggs in the water. Dragonfly nymphs are fully aquatic and are also carnivorous.

When at rest dragonflies spread their two pairs of wings horizontally which distinguishes them from similar looking but more delicate damselflies, that usually hold their wings pressed together against their body when perched.



Illustration: Tim Parker

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