



MIAMI BLUE BUTTERFLY DISCOVERED IN CUBA AMIDST NEW CONCERN IT MAY HAVE BECOME EXTINCT IN THE USA AFTER HURRICANE IRMA

In early September Hurricane Irma left a wide path of destruction through the West Indies and Florida. This category 5 storm not only devastated homes for people, but also ravaged natural habitats, which are homes for unique species of wildlife. The Florida Keys and the northern coast of Cuba were particularly hard hit.

In Florida, only a few wild colonies of the Endangered Miami Blue were known to occur on remote, low-lying islands in the Lower Keys before the storm. Now those colonies most likely have been wiped out by the hurricane. Fortunately, in 2015 and 2016, TREE Institute conservation scientists and volunteers found Miami Blue butterflies in several coastal areas of northeastern Cuba. However, this area was also impacted by Hurricane Irma. A single Miami Blue spotted in this region of Cuba during the recovery from the storm is a hopeful sign. The optimism comes as a result of multiple locations of Miami Blue habitats that haven't been developed or altered.

In a few weeks, Dr. Marc Minno will be leading a small team of volunteers to Cuba to search for this butterfly. Together with Cuban scientists they plan to validate how many Miami Blue populations still survive there. Other validation trips to Cuba and the Florida Keys are planned for 2018 as well. Anyone interested in helping with the search should contact TREE Institute International at admin@treeinstitute.org

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