

## TASMANIAN HAIRSTREAK BUTTERFLY IN WESTERN TASMANIA

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### Observation

On Monday the 1st December 1986, whilst crossing through a heavily wooded creekline, a northern tributary of the Pocacker River at Birchs Inlet at the very southern end of the Macquarie Harbour, I located at least 2 specimens of the adult stage of the Hairstreak Butterfly *Pseudalmenus chlorinda*.

The butterflies were flying around a group of 2 or 3 blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*) trees in a fairly open section of the woodland where the blackwoods, some 8-10m tall, were growing in a pyramid shape with foliage almost down to ground level.

The day was extremely hot and there was little or no wind. The butterflies were very active, spending long periods of several minutes flying around and up and down all sections of the trees. Two were flying together at one stage and then a (?third) single butterfly flew around on its own a little later. At first I was at a loss to be able to identify them for the very last thing I was thinking of was the Hairstreak on the west coast. Whilst in flight the only colours which could readily be seen was the gray of the hindwing with flashes of red from the lower forewing. It was only when one of the butterflies settled on a leaf with wings open that I realised that they were in fact Hairstreaks. The one which settled was a female and displayed the strong orange bars of the inner upperwing and a strong red bar around the inner margin of the lower wing.

I was unable to take any specimens as I was not carrying a butterfly net at the time, however I was able to examine the butterflies over a period of approximately 15-20 minutes through 7x42 binoculars and, as I am particularly familiar with this species, identification is beyond doubt.

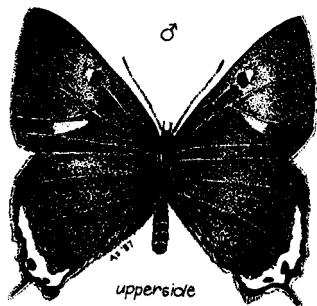
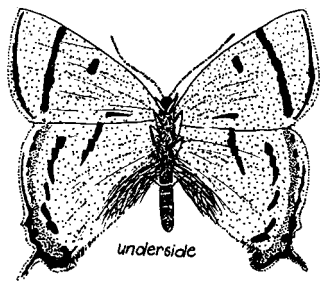
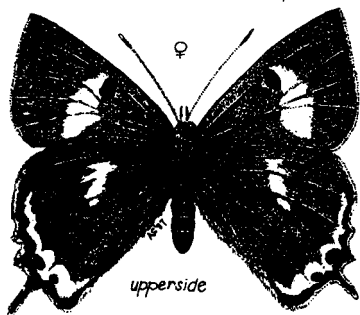
### Background

Having examined specimens from most parts of its known range in Tasmania where there are 4 described races I would conclude that this butterfly is fairly close to the nominate race *P.c. chlorinda*, although fairly bright, and perhaps most closely resembles specimens I have taken from the Buckland area.

Although the larval foodplant at most known colonies is silver wattle (*Acacia dealbata*), occasionally blackwood and other wattles are used. One notable such colony is at Port Sorell on the north coast, so the use of blackwood by the colony is by no means unique. It also uses blackwood extensively on the Australian mainland (L. Couchman pers. comm.). The life cycle of the butterfly has been described in Couchman and Couchman (1977).

In most colonies the species is associated with the ant *Iridomyrmex foetans* and larvae pupate under the bark of *Eucalyptus viminalis*. This eucalypt does not occur on the west coast other than in the far north-west. Where the butterfly was located the only eucalypts present were *E. nitida* and *E. ovata*. No effort was made to look for ants at this site, but, 'stink ants' are common in woodland in the south-west.

10mm  
 hairstreak butterfly



### Significance

It had hitherto been thought that *P. chlorinda* was a species whose range was confined to dry sclerophyll woodland in the east of the State, widely distributed but in a restricted number of localised colonies east of a line from Port Sorell south to Ouse and through to Kingston, principally within the geographical range of *E. viminalis*. This find opens up the possibility that the species is in fact found throughout the State and future researchers should examine areas beyond *E. viminalis*/A. *dealbata* woodland and particularly examine shrubby and regrowth blackwood in November and December for flying insects. The butterfly which was examined whilst at rest was in fact in fairly good condition. There were slight signs of wear on the upper wing margins but my estimate would be that the butterfly was certainly less than one week old. I would guess the butterfly is on the wing between early November and mid December in the west of the State.

### Reference

Couchman, L.E. and Couchman, R. (1977). The Butterflies of Tasmania. *Tasmanian Year Book*, 11:66-96.