

Euphilotes rita (Rita Blue)



Steve Cary,

Taxonomy

- **Class:** INSECTA
- **Order:** LEPIDOPTERA
- **Family:** LYCAENIDAE
- **Genus:** Euphilotes
- **Scientific Name:** *Euphilotes rita* (Barnes and McDunnough, 1916)
- **Common Name:** Rita Blue
- **Synonyms:**
- **Taxonomic Name Source:** Pelham, J. P. 2008. A catalogue of the butterflies of the United States and Canada with a complete bibliography of the descriptive and systematic literature. *The Journal of Research on the Lepidoptera*. Volume 40. 658 pp. Revised 14 February, 2012.

Agency Status

- **NMDGF:**
- **Federal Status:**
- **BLM Sensitive:**
- **USFS:**
- **IUCN Red List:** [Not Evaluated](#)
- **Nature Serve Global:** [G3](#)
- **NHNM State:** S3
- **NM Endemic:** NO

Description

Rita's Blue follows the general *Euphilotes* look, but minor differences are apparent. The topside orange band on female hindwings is rather broad. On males, the dorsal hindwing pink/orange aurora is more fully expressed and is accompanied by four or five well-defined, circular black spots in the submargin. The dorsal forewing black margin is thin, no more than 10% of the wing radius, as in Ellis' Blue but not Central Blue. Fringe checkering is weak. Ventral forewing black spots are prominent, less smeared.

Description courtesy of Steven J. Cary, [Butterflies of New Mexico](#), 2024

Habitat and Ecology

This species mostly lives in lower and upper Sonoran zone deserts and prairies but can also be found in pinyon juniper and oak woodlands and on sand dunes and plateaus (Scott 1986, Opler and Wright 1999, Glassberg 2001, Cary and Toliver 2024). All of this species host plants are Buckwheats (*Eriogonum*) and known host plants include Effuse Buckwheat (*Eriogonum effusum*), Wright's Buckwheat (*Eriogonum wrightii*), Yellow Buckwheat (*Eriogonum flavum*), and Sorrel Buckwheat (*Eriogonum polycladon*) (Scott 1986, Opler and Wright 1999, Glassberg 2001, Cary and Toliver 2024). Glassberg (2001) also reports the use of "Loose Buckwheat" however, we could not find a species with this common name (Glassberg 2001).

This species has one flight which usually occurs from July to late September with the species numbers peaking in August (Scott 1986, Opler and Wright 1999, Glassberg 2001, Brock and Kaufman 2003, Cary and Toliver 2024). During flight adults feed on nectar especially from their host flowers and also sip on mud for moisture (Scott 1986, Cary and Toliver 2024). Adults never wander far from their host plants, mostly perching and nectar on them; however, males can be seen patrolling around host plants seeking females (Scott 1986, Cary and Toliver 2024). After mating eggs are laid in the flowers of the host plant and the larvae eat the flowers and young fruits (Scott 1986). Larvae of this species like many *Lycaenidae* are also ant tended and don't make nests (Scott 1986). This species overwinters as a pupae (Scott 1986).

Geographic Range:

This species is described as living from southern Wyoming south into west Texas and northern Chihuahua before the species distribution heads west into southern Utah, Nevada and eastern Arizona (Mattoni 1995, Scott 1986, Opler and Wright 1999, Cary and Toliver 2024, NatureServe 2024). In older sources the species is also described in southern California, and in Mono county California however these records now belong to the Pallid Blue (*Euphilotes rita pallescens*) which has now been elevated to a full species (Scott 1986, Pelham 2024). Butterflies of America does list a subspecies of this taxa in Montana *Euphilotes rita montanensis* however this population is not fully documented and there is little to no information on it so at this time we omit it from the geographic range of this species however, it is thought to occur or have occurred in Carbon county Montana (Kohler and Warren 2021, Pelham 2024). In New Mexico this species is described as living between 1460 and 2440 meters in elevation (4800 to 8000 feet) (Cary and Toliver 2024).

Conservation Considerations: