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Legal Victory Speeds Habitat Protection for Endangered Miami Tiger Beetles

Species Is Threatened by Development, Sea-Level Rise

ST. PETERSBURG, *Fla.*— The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service agreed today to finalize critical habitat for endangered Miami tiger beetles by May 8. The announcement marks a legal victory for the Center for Biological Diversity, Miami Blue Chapter of the North American Butterfly Association, and Tropical Audubon Society. These native beetles face devastating habitat loss from unfettered development and sea-level rise.

“The Miami tiger beetles’ existence depends on protecting the last habitat they have, so this is a crucial step,” said Ragan Whitlock, a Florida-based attorney at the Center. “These tiny, ferocious beetles are down to their last two populations, and I’m so happy that the last places they live will soon be protected.”

In response to a 2014 Center [petition](#), the Service listed the beetle as endangered in 2016 but did not concurrently designate critical habitat as required by the Endangered Species Act. Following [legal action](#) by the Center, the Service finally [proposed](#) critical habitat for the beetle in 2021, but the agency has failed to finalize the protections.

“We’re glad to see that the Service is finally taking this action, which is crucial to the survival of this highly endangered species,” said Dennis Olle, president of the Miami Blue Chapter of the North American Butterfly Association. “It is unfortunate that it takes a lawsuit to get the Service to do its job.”

“It has been a long road, but we are thrilled that this endemic species is finally receiving the much-needed critical habitat designation it needs to survive and, hopefully, thrive once again,” said Lauren Jonaitis, senior conservation director of Tropical Audubon Society. “This critical habitat designation benefits the Miami tiger beetle by protecting its primary home, the globally imperiled, crucially important Pine Rocklands habitat.”

The Center filed its 2014 listing petition based on development threats to the Miami tiger beetles’ Richmond Pine Rocklands habitat in south Miami. This area is where the beetles were [rediscovered](#) in 2007, six decades after they were initially discovered. The pine rocklands contain the vast majority and largest single block of their remaining habitat, as well as habitat for several other endangered species.

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Animals with federally protected critical habitat are more than twice as likely to be moving toward recovery than species without such protections. Federal agencies that fund or permit projects in critical habitat are required to consult with the Service to ensure this habitat is not harmed or destroyed by their actions.

Miami tiger beetles are as small as a grain of rice and beautifully gem-like, with an emerald sheen. They're known to occur in only two populations, separated by urban development, in Miami-Dade County, and are named for their aggressive, predatory behavior and strong mandibles. Their proposed critical habitat largely overlaps with designated critical habitat for Carter's small-flowered flax, Florida brickell-bush, and Bartram's scrub-hairstreak and Florida leafwing butterflies.

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 1.7 million members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

The Miami Blue Chapter serves southeastern Florida, specifically Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties. We are a membership based, not-for-profit organization working to increase the public enjoyment and conservation of butterflies. The Chapter is named after one of the rarest butterflies in North America, which used to (and one day will again) call Miami home.

Tropical Audubon Society is a science- and solutions-based nonprofit conservation organization driven by its grassroots community and principles of equity, diversity and inclusion. Tropical Audubon's Legacy is to protect, conserve and restore South Florida ecosystems by working closely with local governments and other stakeholders, and by fostering wise stewardship of native habitats, birds and other indigenous wildlife.

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