**Symbiotic Relationships**

David Yeates, director of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization’s Australian National Insect Collection, reports that a newly identified ant species “*babysits* the caterpillars from one of Australia's rarest insects, the bulloak jewel butterfly.”

The ants, now identified as the *Anonychomyrma inclinata* species,carry the little caterpillars out from under the bark of the bulloak tree to feed on the soft tips of the leaves or needles at night; they carry them out and then back," Dr. Yeates explains.

This is a symbiotic relationship between the bulloak jewel butterflies and this species of ants. The ants protect the butterfly caterpillars from predators as they embrace the caterpillars while they feed at night. At the same time, the ants nourish themselves by feeding on “a sugary substance” the caterpillars produce from glands on their bodies.

The ants could eat the caterpillars but choose to maintain a relationship that benefits both species. These two species along with the bulloak trees have co-evolved together.

Bulloak jewel butterflies are endangered, Dr. Yeates explains, but knowing that the species survives where its caterpillars are protected by ants in bulloak trees will enable scientists to effectively preserve all three of these species.

When we realize that co-evolution based on symbiotic relationships is the way nature preserves diverse species in ecosystems, perhaps we will come to extend our compassion to embrace the living-worlds all around us.

**Might we make an eco-choice not to kill caterpillars in “our” trees to protect a habitat we share with butterflies and also countless other species? Might we extend our compassion in political and economic eco-choices to sustain ecosystems?**

Nick Kilvert, “Weevils in caves, fish, and an ant that 'babysits' caterpillars among 139 new species classified by CSIRO,” Aug 8, 2022, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/science/2022-08-09/csiro-names-139-new-species-animals-and-plants/101305442>.

CSIRO photos: butterfly/Michael Braby; ant carrying caterpillar/Jon Lewis.