



**PINPOINTING PROBLEMS:** Researcher Hemchandranauth Sambhu is about to conduct surveys of butterfly populations across the Wet Tropics.

Picture: ANNA ROGERS

## Blunder may be helping wipe out butterflies

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THE most iconic butterfly in the Wet Tropics may be dying out due to people planting the wrong tree species for them to feed upon.

Ulysses butterflies have

been dying in captivity in the Far North, with breeders also claiming the wild populations have dropped dramatically.

James Cook University PhD student Hemchandranauth Sambhu will survey butterfly diversity across Cairns district in the next 12 months.

Mr Sambhu said one element of his survey would be to gather a population estimate of Ulysses butterflies in local forests.

He said if there had indeed been a decrease in butterfly populations, it might be as a result of a simple mistake that

residents were making.

"The Ulysses feeds on a native host plant, and some people may think they are doing the right thing by planting a plant of the same genus, except it's a different species," he said.

"They may have thought they were actually helping the

butterfly, but those plants are actually toxic to the caterpillars ... it actually decreases the population – all by a big mistake."

He said, overall, it appeared Cairns residents had increased efforts to maintain a healthy population of butterflies.