

PIPEVINE SWALLOWTAIL (*Battus philenor*)

The Pipevine Swallowtail is native to North and Central America. Its range extends from Connecticut south to Mexico and Central America and west to Arizona, with isolated pockets in northern California and Ontario. In Florida it's found mostly in the northern and central regions of the state.

The Pipevine Swallowtail's habitat is open woodlands, brushy fields, and meadows where it enjoys the nectar of many flowers such as thistle, lilac, bee balm, azalea, phlox, lantana, petunia, lupine, verbena, butterfly bush, swamp milkweed, and Mexican sunflower. It prefers pink, purple, and orange flowers.

Pipevine Swallowtails are sometimes referred to as Blue Swallowtails because of their striking coloration. The dorsal surface of their wings is black with a vibrant iridescent blue on their hind wings. They also have small cream-colored marginal spots on both their fore and hind wings and slightly larger supra marginal spots on their hind wings.

The underside of their wings is a duller black with iridescent blue and a row of seven bright orange spots on their hind wings.



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The wingspan of Pipevine Swallowtails ranges from 2 3/4 to 5 inches. Females are slightly larger and have a slightly duller iridescent blue coloration.

The Pipevine Swallowtail uses only one genus for its host plant, *Aristolochia*, commonly known as pipevines or Dutchman's pipe because of its appearance, or birthwort because of its Greek root, *aristos* (best) and *lochia* (delivery or childbirth.) Three native species of pipevine are found in zones 8 - 10 in Florida: Virginia snakeroot (*A. serpentaria*), woolly Dutchman's pipe (*A. tomentosa*), and Marsh's Dutchman's pipe (*A. pentandra*). Two species native to South America (*A. littorals*, commonly known as calico flower, and *A. elegant*, commonly known as elegant Dutchman's pipe) have been sold by nurseries but are **not recommended** because of their tendency to escape cultivation and be invasive and difficult to eradicate. They have winged seeds that disperse and germinate readily and thick heavy vines and dense leaves which crush native plants. They have above and below ground stems and roots which make them difficult to kill.



peganum from Henfield, England, CC BY-SA 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons



Adult female Pipevine Swallowtails lay clusters of orange-red eggs on pipevine leaves which hatch in 4-10 days, depending on temperature.



The larvae are black/brown with numerous short orange tubercles which grow progressively longer with each subsequent instar.



There's also a red form of Pipevine Swallowtail larvae, especially prevalent in the western regions of its range.

The caterpillars eat the pipevine leaves which contain aristolochic acid which is poisonous to animals and humans and can cause irreversible kidney failure. Thus, making both the caterpillars and adult butterflies poisonous to their predators such as birds, parasitic wasps, and flies. The larval stage lasts 3-4 weeks. The chrysalis can be either green or brown. This pupal stage lasts 10-20 days except for the final generation of the year. In Florida the Pipevine Swallowtail November generation will emerge in February after the pipevine leaves have sprouted out. The adult butterfly will live for 6 - 14 days and produce 3 generations in Florida.

Because of the toxicity of the Pipevine Swallowtail to predators, several other nontoxic butterflies have evolved to mimic its appearance. This is called Batesian mimicry. Some examples of this are the dark morph of the female Eastern Tiger Swallowtail which we have covered, the Red-Spotted Purple, the Spicebush Swallowtail, and the female sexes of the Black Swallowtail, Ozark Swallowtail, Missouri Swallowtail, and the Diana Fritillaries which we'll cover in the future.

Mary Jo Davis is the Chair of the Birds, Butterflies, Bats and Bees Committee.