

Conservation Corner

By Corinne Peterson
Pocahontas County Naturalist



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“Just living is not enough,” said the butterfly.
“One must have sunshine, freedom, and a little flower.”

—Hans Christian Anderson

Summer is in full swing and July is quickly passing by – time to complete our IBSN butterfly walks! With its warm, sunny days filled with butterfly flights, July is one of the best months for counting butterflies. On my first walk in late June, I counted 57 butterflies representing six species, including 25 Monarchs. I was surprised to see so many Monarchs this early in the season, especially as their spring population numbers dipped 15 percent coming out of winter migration. Perhaps the early hot March weather in Texas was a good thing. I also spotted a couple swallowtails – time to encounter these large, showy butterflies.



Swallowtails are named for the forked appearance of their hind wings. As members of the Family Papilionidae, they have six walking legs, clubbed antennae, and their thorax and head are similar in size. While most of the 550 species of swallowtails are tropical, they are found on every continent except Antarctica. Iowa is home to six swallowtail species in three genera, but only three are found in Pocahontas County, all breeding residents and members of the *Papilio* genus.

I'll open with the Black Swallowtails that were visiting the Varina Wetlands, easily recognized with their black body, two vertical rows of yellow spots, blue band, red anal spot with black center, and wingspan of 3 – 4½ inches. Black Swallowtails overwinter in the pupa stage resulting in early spring flights. Unlike most species, their caterpillars change dramatically. The first two instar stages look like bird droppings, the third is mostly black, while the fourth is green. Adult nectar favorites include red clover, milkweed, and thistles; while caterpillars dine on members of the carrot family, including parsley, dill, and Queen Anne's lace. Because of the abundance of their host plants, Black Swallowtails are the most commonly observed swallowtail.

Giant Swallowtails are very strong flyers, with wingspans of 3½ to 6¼ inches. A horizontal band of yellow spots runs across their black-brown wings. In Iowa, their host plants are prickly ash and hoptrees, our only members of the citrus family; while azalea, bouncing Bets, dame's rocket, goldenrod, and swamp milkweed are preferred nectar plants. Giant Swallowtail larvae, which may cause damage in citrus groves, are named Orange Dogs for their orange scent horns and very strong odor.

I'll close with the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, a familiar yellow butterfly with black margins and tiger-like stripes on their front forewing edges, blue chevrons and orange spots on their hindwings, and wingspans of 2½ to 4½ inches. Larvae feed on several common trees including ash and wild cherry, while adults nectar on wild cherry and lilac in the spring and milkweed and Joe-pye weed in the summer. Their larvae have two large eyespots to intimidate predators. Good photo ops for Eastern Tiger Swallowtails include mud puddles or nectar plants, including the coneflowers in our backyard.

Like the butterflies, enjoy the July sunshine, freedom, and flowers!