

black swallowtail

Papilio polyxenes

FEATURES

The black swallowtail butterfly has a wingspan of about three and one-eighth to four and one-half inches. The upper surface of the wings is basically black. The male has a yellow band near the edge of the wings, while the female has a row of yellow dots in the same position but lacks the band of color. The hindwing of the female shows a blue band of color. The hindwing has an orange spot with a black dot centered in it. The abdomen has rows of yellow spots. The black swallowtail caterpillar is green with black bands and rows of orange dots.

BEHAVIORS

The black swallowtail butterfly may be found statewide in Illinois, living in open areas, such as fields and gardens. It feeds on plants of the parsley family, for example, wild carrot, parsley and dill. It is active from April through October. The life cycle includes egg, larva, pupa and adult stages. It overwinters in the pupal stage. The larva has a defensive gland which it may stick out from behind its head when disturbed. The adult female looks very much like the pipevine swallowtail butterfly, one that tastes bad to predators when they attempt to eat it. The predators learn from trying to eat the pipevine swallowtail to avoid anything that looks like it. The female black swallowtail gains some protection in this manner.

TAXONOMY

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Arthropoda
Class: Insecta
Order: Lepidoptera
Family: Papilionidae

ILLINOIS STATUS

common, native

ILLINOIS RANGE





larval stages



pupa





Aquatic Habitats

none

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

black soil prairie; dolomite prairie; edge; gravel prairie; hill prairie; sand prairie; shrub prairie