

Montana  Pollinator
Education Project

Western Tiger Swallowtail Butterfly



tails on wing bottoms

Western Tiger Swallowtail Butterfly

Papilio rutulus

Genus: **Papilio** Family: **Papilionidae**

7 - 10 cm wingspan

Over 550 species



Swallowtail butterflies are found all over the world except in Antarctica.

Swallowtail butterflies and their relatives account for some of the largest butterflies in the world, with the largest of the species found in the southern area of Asia.

The Western Swallowtail butterfly is yellow with black stripes and has a distinct tail on the bottom of each wing. The Western Swallowtail butterfly also has blue and orange dots in a line near the bottom of each wing. Each summer you may find it easy to spot a Swallowtail butterfly because of their large size and distinct colors

Western Swallowtail butterfly on a lilac bloom

The females lay their eggs on the underside of leaves; generally leaves of cottonwoods, willows, and quaking aspen trees. Females lay up to 100 eggs, and in only four days the larvae will emerge from the eggs. Young larvae look similar to bird droppings; this is to protect them from predators. The larvae will molt up to five times before pupating. About two weeks after the caterpillar pupated the butterfly will emerge; if it is the last life cycle of the fall the pupae will not emerge as a butterfly until spring.

Groups of male Swallowtail butterflies are often seen in shallow puddles, they are gathering minerals and moisture from the mud and water. It is possible to see Eastern Swallowtail butterflies in Montana too, generally east of the continental divide. The Swallowtail butterfly rarely sits for very long, and is often seen flying back and forth along tree lines.