

Pipevine Swallowtail

The Pipevine Swallowtail Butterfly (*Battus philenor*) is a large butterfly with a 2¾-3¼ inch (70-85 mm) wingspan. This distinctive butterfly is fairly common in California. The upper surface of the wings is black to dark gray overlaid with a brilliant, metallic blue color especially on the hind wing. Males are generally more brightly colored than females. The upper surface of the hindwing also has a row of cream to yellow spots around the outer edge. The lower surface of the wings is dull gray with a distinctive row of big, bright orange spots on the hind wing. The butterflies are in flight primarily in late spring and throughout the summer.

Adult pipevine swallowtails feed on nectar from a variety of flowers including honeysuckle, buddleia, azalea, lilac, thistle, lantana, petunias, and lupines. They inhabit open areas such as open woodlands, gardens, and parks. However, the caterpillars only feed on pipevine plants in the genus *Aristolochia* (family Aristolochaceae).

Female pipevine swallowtail butterflies lay their eggs in a cluster on the bottom surface of leaves of pipevine plants. The caterpillars of this species feed only on two species of pipevine, *Aristolochia californica* and *A. serpentaria*. Feeding on these plants gives the caterpillars and butterflies an unpleasant taste, causing birds and other potential

predators to avoid them.

Mature caterpillars get as long as 2 inches (5 cm) long. They are rusty black-colored with black or red projections, the longest ones are on the head. The insect spends the winter in the chrysalis stage and emerges as an adult with the return of warmer weather in the late spring. Several butterflies, such as the female Eastern black swallowtail, the female spicebush swallowtail, the female Diana fritillary, and the red spotted purple, have color patterns on their wings that greatly resemble the pipevine swallowtail. This kind of similarity, known as Batesian mimicry, may protect the mimics from predators.



Pipevine swallowtail caterpillar.



Pipevine swallowtail, photo courtesy of Kathy Garvey.