

Warning, some photos may cause Creepy Crawlies or Heeby Jeebies

This Month's MVB is ... The Canadian Tiger Swallowtail , *Papilio canadensis*

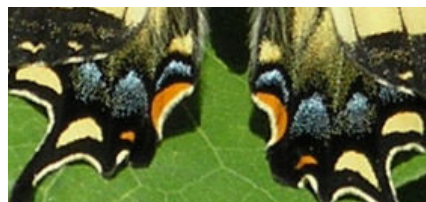


A thriving North American species that is not at risk of species decline.

Everybody has seen a Canadian Tiger Swallowtail at least once in their life, especially if you've visited us at the Greenhouse, these beauties are constantly popping into our retail house to sample our hanging baskets and basket stuffers. Absolutely harmless to humans so you can let one land on you with no fear. However, please do not pick one up! They are very delicate and even the smallest tear in the wrong spot could make them flightless and very vulnerable to predators. Only let them crawl onto your finger or let them land on you themselves to limit risk of harm to their wings.

The Canadian Tiger Swallowtail can be found throughout Canada in various habitats that consist of sunny areas full of greenery and deciduous trees, even as far north as the tundra! This can include woodlands, meadows, and gardens. They tend to prefer Birch, Poplar, and/or Black Cherry for laying their eggs on. While protected within silken mats found on the leaves of said trees the caterpillars will eat any leaves close to its resting area.

Visually stunning with a wingspan of approximately 3 inches they are easy to spot, it also helps that their pattern is quite striking living up to the tiger name with vivid yellow and bold black stripes, however the under wing is much much paler in comparison. Males tend to have a more bold pattern with thinner black stripes whereas females are more muted and pale with a patch of blue on their lower wings. A pointed forewing helps distinguish them from other swallowtails in the area, such as the eastern swallowtail. Both sexes have a small patch of orange and black dot at the base of the tail designed to resemble eyes, one of their only defences against predators.



The Canadian Tiger Swallowtail is known for its impressive routine of mimicry throughout its life, employing different tactics at different life stages. The larvae use Batesian mimicry, their appearance can resemble bird droppings and they also remain very still to enhance the deception. At a max size of 2 inches it has a glossy dark brown/black body speckled with white or cream coloured dots giving it the bird droppings effect and enhancing its camouflage for better protection from predators.

Older Caterpillars take on the appearance of a snake with a bright green body featuring false eyes on their larger thorax and can even sway side to side when threatened.



Once it reaches the instar stage it begins to change colour to a vibrant green once again to mimic its surroundings as now it will look like a fresh young leaf emerging from a bud. The older caterpillars can also have blue and yellow markings on their body adding to their unique beauty.



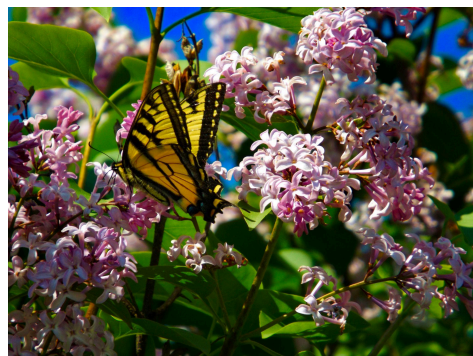
Now comes one of my favourite features of the Canadian Tiger Swallowtail, they possess an organ known as the osmeterium that is forked and yellow. When disturbed they can project osmeterium from their head and release a foul smell to deter predators. I'll admit when I was younger I did my fair share of tormenting these poor little guys just to see the little "horns" pop out. Back then I didn't know what they actually were or what their purpose was, I just thought it was cool, even funny, to watch. Of course I feel terrible now knowing that they were likely terrified the whole time and I now show them the utmost respect and give them space to feel comfortable, or at the very least, not like they are about to be eaten.

In one year the Canadian Tiger Swallowtail can have one to two generations, depending on their geographical locations. In the Northern regions they usually only have one generation while in southern areas they can have up to two. The adult butterflies will sadly only live 2-3

weeks, however the overall life span, including caterpillars, can be just shy of a year! From Larva to pupa can be up to 2 months, Overwintering Pupa while in dormancy can live up to 9 months and then of course the adult butterfly is only up to 3 weeks. This life cycle duration also depends on resources available, climate conditions and presence of predators.

Once again we love their diet! The Canadian Tiger Swallowtail is another favourite pollinator of the garden. Unlike the Yellow Banded Bubble Bee, the younger caterpillar stages can actually cause some damage to host plants as they like to eat the foliage of Birches, Aspens, Cherries, and Poplar. Although they prefer these species most, any deciduous tree will do in a pinch. They are unlikely to group together and cause large amounts of damage like army worms do, so i wouldnt worry too much about it.

As they metamorphose into adult butterflies their diet changes to nectar based only, they need the higher sugar content to help fuel their airborne life. Some of their favourite sources of nectar are: Lilac, Milkweed, chokecherry, and Wild Cherries. Interestingly enough they can sometimes be spotted on the ground on the edges of puddles, mud or damp sand doing what is called "Puddling". Puddling is a process in which they land near small patches of still water to extract essential minerals and salts from the soil.



How can you help the Canadian Tiger Swallowtail thrive? Although they are not considered an at risk species it is always good to be a nice neighbor and help our little friends when we can, remember these guys are also good pollinators and will help your garden thrive. Preserving host plants is one good way to help, keeping cherries on your property will give the Canadian Tiger Swallowtail somewhere to lay their eggs and a nice little nursery for caterpillars to grow. Planting wild butterfly gardens, Lilacs, or milkweed can help ensure that the adult butterflies have enough nectar to travel to new areas, carrying pollen as they go.

At Maries West River Greenhouses we all appreciate our local beneficials and believe they are ultimately the best form of natural insect control in the garden but we are not experts on the subject. The purpose of these posts is to raise awareness to the fact that not all insects are harmful and we should keep that in mind when applying insecticides for pest control.

Sources:

[Canadian Tiger Swallowtail: Identification, Life Cycle, and Behavior - Insectic](#)

[Canadian Tiger Swallowtail Papilio canadensis Rothschild & Jordan, 1906 | Butterflies and Moths of North America](#)

https://www.butterfliesandmoths.org/sites/default/files/bamona_images/Papilio_canadensis_dorsal_BeaLaporte-crop.jpg

<https://th.bing.com/th/id/R.74dd7c57af120aa132d2f6c17c4d1724?rik=IRqY0HQHqu90Fw&pid=ImgRaw&r=0>

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