

MAY 15 - 31, 2020 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

By Dick Harlow

CANADIAN TIGER VS EASTERN TIGER SWALLOWTAIL



Canadian Tiger Swallowtail, *Papilio canadensis*, © Dick Harlow

There seems to be either ultimate confusion, or simply ignorance of the data concerning this species and the subspecies that exist.

When there is so much similarity between the looks of two subspecies, one can understand why there can be confusion when you are trying to distinguish between the two.

The Canadian Tiger Swallowtail, *Papilio canadensis*, seems to be more cold-weather tolerant compared with the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, *Papilio glaucus*. The Eastern Tiger is found along the eastern seaboard all the way to Florida and Alabama but doesn't seem to venture north of the middle of Vermont. However, the overlap area is between Middlebury and Rutland, VT.

How can one distinguish, when the visual characteristics are so similar? If you see a Tiger Swallowtail on Lilac flowers it is most likely a Canadian Tiger Swallowtail.



Canadian Tiger Swallowtail, *Papilio canadensis*, © Dick Harlow

If you see a Tiger Swallowtail at the end of June and from then on, it is most probably an Eastern, as long as it is seen south of Rutland, VT.

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Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, Male, *Papilio glaucus*, © Kenneth Dwain Harrelson

As well as being found along the eastern coastline, the Eastern Tiger is also common in Texas and into the Great Plains.

This butterfly is a generalist!

It can be found wherever there are deciduous forests and is common in all kinds of habitats such as meadows, fields, gardens, woodlands, even local parks or city greens.



Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, Female, *Papilio glaucus*, © Tyler Arboretum

The **Eastern Tiger Swallowtail's** ability to detoxify its larval food is due to its genetic traits. However, it does have a problem within the larval stages of development past the first larval instar stage. According to the references, when the larva feeds on **Quaking Aspen**, *Populus tremeloides*, its survival rate is only 15%. On the other hand, **Canadian Tiger Swallowtail** cannot only survive on this food source but thrives on it very well.

Not to belabor the point, but my problem with identification relative to visual characteristics that are similar is a conundrum. The Eastern Tiger has a series of unconnected yellow spots along the wing margins. The Canadian Tiger is supposed to have a continuous yellow band. I always see disconnected yellow spots or dots, some closer to each other, some farther apart. Is this really a difference? Another differing characteristic is on the wing margin closest to the abdomen. The black, gray-black band along this inner margin is supposed to be wide on the wing of the Canadian Tiger. How much wider? What is the gauge here? How does one measure that when looking at it with your naked eye or with binoculars?

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Which Tiger Swallowtail is it? © Dick Harlow

For me, I will opt for any Tiger Swallowtail that I see in May and June here in Middlebury, as a Canadian Tiger. Any that I see after June and for the rest of the year I will consider an Eastern Tiger. This is arbitrary, I know, but until the experts come up with a more definitive method of telling the difference between these two so-called subspecies, I have to go with what has been written to date. Swallowtails on flowering Lilacs most probably are Canadian Tiger Swallowtails. June might be an overlap month, so it is arbitrary on my part for calling Tiger Swallowtails seen that month here in middle Vermont as being a Canadian Swallowtail. However, I feel good about July and later months calling these Tiger Swallowtails as being Eastern Tiger Swallowtails.

OBSERVATIONS

MAMMALS

White-tailed Deer
Gray Fox
Eastern Cottontail

REPTILES

Eastern Milk Snake

AMPHIBIANS

Peepers
Green Frog
Bull Frog

BUTTERFLIES

Cabbage White
Clouded Sulfur
Silvery Blue
Mustard White

MOTHS

Large unknown Moth

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Weather Tidbits

Month of MAY 1-31, 2020

All Measurements taken at solar noon (1230 EST).

PRECIPITATION

Total Precipitation: 53.6 mm or 2.11 inches. Average for May is 3.46 inches, thus we are 1.35 inches below average.

Overcast Days: 8

Eastern Milk Snake



View of Eastern Milk Snake © Gail Lyall

First record for EastView.