



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Schaus Swallowtail Butterfly

Partnerships with Private Landowners: A Vital Piece of the Conservation Puzzle



One of Florida's rarest butterflies, the Schaus swallowtail (*Papilio aristodemus ponceanus*), is getting a little help to aid its conservation. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Cheeca Lodge, a 27-acre golf resort, and the University of Florida's McGuire Center for Lepidoptera Research, have planted torchwood and wild lime trees on the grounds of Cheeca Lodge to attract the butterfly and give it a special area to feed, rest, and intermingle.



The Schaus swallowtail has black-brown wings with yellow markings and a broad rusty patch underneath the hind wing. One of the reasons it is unique is because it can stop suddenly in mid-air and fly backwards to avoid its predators — birds, lizards, and spiders. Conservation of the species is particularly important because random events could cause its extinction. Adult individuals have a life span of only one month.

Only about 350 Schaus swallowtail adults are left in the Florida Keys — this swallowtail's only known home. To avoid extinction, this species needs to start repopulating other suitable habitat from Biscayne Bay to Matecumbe Key, where Cheeca Lodge is located. This area also includes Key Largo and Plantation Key.

A \$55,000 grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation allowed the planting of the nectar-producing trees on the golf course at Cheeca Lodge — just the sort of tropical hardwood hammock the butterfly requires. Adults feast on the nectar of torchwood trees, and these trees also provide food for the caterpillars when they hatch.

No Schaus swallowtails currently exist at Cheeca Lodge in Islamorada. We hope the trees at Cheeca Lodge will provide this swallowtail with an inviting flyway, a place to feed and rest as it moves between habitats in the northern Keys. We also hope that other private landowners in the Keys will follow Cheeca's pioneering example of habitat restoration to save this fragile but valuable butterfly.

The Schaus swallowtail has been on the list of threatened and endangered species for at least 20 years. It was first listed as threatened and then was reclassified as endangered in 1984. Hurricane Andrew nearly blew it into extinction in 1992, leaving only 73 individuals alive. Captive-breeding programs are helping to restore the Schaus swallowtail population in the Keys. However, the species' recovery is still hindered by insecticide use, habitat destruction, droughts, hurricanes and illegal collection.

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Photos, top to bottom: Male Schaus on pentas, Schaus and eggs, Schaus eggs on wild lime tree, by Dr. Thomas C. Emmel, Zoology Department, University of Florida, Gainesville.