

Palamedes Swallowtail

Pterourus palamedes

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The **Palamedes Swallowtail** (*Pterourus palamedes*) is a large black butterfly restricted to the Deep South. It is common in moist woodlands and swamps throughout Florida, but readily ventures into adjacent more open areas including yards and gardens. Adults have a strong, swift flight but are fond of flowers and readily pause at available blossoms to feed. Females deposit small, round cream-colored eggs singly on the new growth of various Laurel family plants including Red Bay (*Persea borbonia*). The sizeable green larvae have an enlarged thorax with a pair of prominent false eyes that resemble the head of a snake or lizard. This unique disguise may help startle would-be predators.

While generally a common butterfly, the Palamedes Swallowtail has likely suffered in recent years from the spread of Laurel Wilt, a deadly disease caused by a fungus that is introduced into host trees by the nonnative Ambrosia Beetle. The resulting outbreak has decimated bay populations across much of the Southeast. It is currently unknown what long term impacts the disease will have on the abundance of this butterfly.

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Cover photo by: Bill Berthet

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