

Zebra Longwing

(*Heliconius charithonia*)

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Florida Museum
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The **Zebra Longwing** (*Heliconius charithonia*) is Florida's state butterfly. Aptly named, the adults have elongated black wings with pale yellow stripes. Found throughout Florida, it is a butterfly of woodlands, forest edges and adjacent open areas including gardens. Adults have a slow, graceful flight and readily visit available flowers where they are easy to closely observe. A year-round resident of the southern counties, it is sensitive to freezing temperatures and is most abundant in more northern portions of Florida in years with mild winters. Females deposit small, yellow eggs singly or in small clusters on the new growth or tendrils of passionflower vines. The resulting larvae are white with small black spots and black spines. Numerous generations are produced each year.

The Zebra Longwing feeds on both flower nectar and pollen. Adults gather pollen grains on their proboscis, amassing them into a large ball. They then secrete saliva to dissolve the pollen and drink the liquid. The resulting nutrient-rich diet enables individuals to survive for several months, far exceeding the typical few week life span of most adult butterflies. The adults are truly social butterflies and form roosting aggregations on branches or Spanish Moss at night. The same communal roost may be used for many nights.

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Cover photo by: Jaret Daniels

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