

## Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Fact Sheet



Oregon Swallowtail (*Papilio oregonius*)—Big and beautiful, the bright yellow and black patterned Oregon swallowtail is a northwest native. Somewhat wary and a strong flier, the butterfly was designated as Oregon's official insect on July 16, 1979 by the Legislature. It was chosen as a state symbol because it is native to the state, has “Oregon” in its common and scientific names and is considered of great aesthetic value.

### Where does the Oregon swallowtail live?

This butterfly lives east of the Cascades below 4,000 feet elevation in sagebrush-dominated canyons, plateaus and mountains throughout the Columbia and Snake River basins. Most sightings in Oregon are along the mainstems and immediate tributaries of the Columbia, Deschutes and Snake Rivers. The larvae (juveniles) feed on tarragon sagebrush (also called wild tarragon or dragon wormwood, *Artemisia dracunculus*). Adults feed on nectar from a variety of wildflowers, especially thistles, balsamroot and phlox. This swallowtail lives only in Oregon, Washington, Idaho and south-central British Columbia.

### What conservation issues affect the Oregon swallowtail?

The Oregon Swallowtail is doing well in Oregon. Factors that affect sagebrush habitats could potentially impact the Oregon Swallowtail in the future. Concerns for sagebrush habitats include juniper encroachment; conversion to agriculture or other land use changes; noxious weeds and other invasive plants; and unmanaged livestock grazing. The Oregon Conservation Strategy highlights sagebrush as a habitat that needs our help.

### How can Oregonians help the Oregon swallowtail?

- Maintain open sagebrush habitats with tarragon sagebrush along the Snake, Columbia and Deschutes rivers.
- Control noxious weeds that out-compete native plants.
- Maintain or restore diverse wildflowers and native flowering shrubs that bloom from May to June and August to September.
- Remove encroaching young western juniper that may threaten sagebrush habitats.
- Carefully graze livestock to maintain areas suitable for tarragon sagebrush.
- Minimize use of broad spectrum insecticides and moth/butterfly-specific insecticides in sagebrush habitats.

### Did you know?

The Oregon swallowtail was featured on a U.S. postage stamp in 1979. Most experts now believe the Oregon swallowtail is a subspecies of the old world swallowtail (*P. machaon oregonia*). The swallowtail family includes many of the largest and most beautifully colored butterflies in North America.

*the* OREGON  
CONSERVATION  
STRATEGY

3406 Cherry Avenue NE  
Salem, OR 97303  
(503) 947-6000  
[www.dfw.state.or.us](http://www.dfw.state.or.us)



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