



Occurrence of Swallowtails Butterflies in Kanha National Park

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ABSTRACT

The present article deals with the occurrence of swallowtails butterflies (Lepidoptera : Papilionidae) and their host plants in Kanha National Park, Madhya Pradesh. Three species of swallowtails butterflies are found in this park. These are Lemon butterfly, *Papilio demoleus* Linn., the Spot Swordtail, *Papilio nomius* (Esper) and the Common Mormon, *Papilio polytes romulus* Linn. These butterflies are described, their occurrence and host plants are mentioned in the present article.

Key words: Swallowtails butterflies, host plants, Kanha National Park, Madhya Pradesh

Introduction

The members of the subfamily Papilioninae, family Papilionidae and order Lepidoptera are known as swallowtail, having a total of about 550 species. (<https://www.butterflyidentification.com/swallowtail-papilionidae>). The swallowtail butterflies inhabit the tropical regions, they are found in every continent apart from Antarctica. They are named for the characteristic tail-like extensions of the hind wings, although many species are tailless. (<https://www.britannica.com/animal/swallowtail-butterfly>). Colour patterns may vary, although many species have yellow, orange, red, green, or blue markings on an iridescent black, blue, or green background. Sexual and seasonal differences in coloration also occur. Many swallowtails mimic the coloration and patterns of butterflies that are protected by a bad taste. The brightly coloured larvae feed on foliage. Black and yellow eyelike spots on the thorax of some larvae resemble the head of a snake. Many larvae have colour patterns that make them appear to be bird droppings. Many have scent glands and discharge a bad-smelling substance when disturbed.

Joshi *et al.* (2004a,b) have studied insect faunal composition of Kanha National Park and reported 187 species of insects, out of which 51 species of butterflies, 88 species of moths, 20 species of beetles, 8 species of grasshoppers, 6 species of bugs, 5 species of bees, wasps and ants, 4 species of crickets, 4 species of mantids and one species of termite. Three species of Swallowtails butterflies are found in this Park. These are Lemon butterfly, *Papilio demoleus* Linn., the Spot Swordtail, *Papilio nomius* (Esper) and the Common Mormon, *Papilio polytes romulus* Linn. The perusal of literature reveals that the information about these butterflies and their food plants have been published by Evans (1932), Beeson (1941), Browne (1968), Antram, (1986) and Joshi (1992). The present article deals with these aspects of three swallowtails species, *P. demoleus*, *P. nomius* and *P. polytes romulus*.

Lemon butterfly, *Papilio demoleus* Linn.

(Fig.1)

The wing expanse of *P. demoleus* varies from 80-100 mm. It is a large tailless butterfly with black ground colour. Its upper side of wings have broad irregular yellow discal band, which is broken into large irregular spots or patches. Marginal and terminal rows of yellow spots also exist on both wings. Upper sides of hind wing have tornal red spot, apical black and blue spot.

The status of *P. demoleus* is common. This butterfly is prevalent from August to September at Kisli and Kanha ranges of park. Larvae of this swallowtail feed on *Aegle marmelos*, *Chloroxylon swietenia*, *Citrus* spp., *Glycosmis pentaphylla* and *Murraya koenigii*.



Fig.1. *Papilio demoleus*

The Spot Swordtail, *Papilio nomius* Esper

(Fig.2)

The wing expanse of *P. nomius* (syn. *Pathysa nomius*) varies from 75-90 mm. This butterfly is white with dark or black markings. Upper sides of fore wing have broad dark margins with a row of white rounded spots. Four dark bars occur serially in cell and the fifth one remains at its apex. Upper side of the hind wing has a broad outer black band containing white crescents and a patch of grey suffusion at the tornus. Underside of hind wing bears central red spots. Male butterfly bears cottony scent wool in dorsal fold.

The status of this swallowtail species is not rare. Flight of this butterfly is usually low, straight and fast. This species is found in miscellaneous forest of Advar, Kisli and Mukki ranges of park and often very fond of settling on damp and wet drain during hot weather of March- June. Larvae of this butterfly feed on *Polyalthia longifolia* and *Saccopetalum tomentosum*.



Fig.2. *Papilio nomius*

The Common Mormon, *Papilio polytes romulus* Linn.

(Fig.3)

The wing expanse of *P. polytes romulus* varies from 90-100 mm. This butterfly is tailed, black, UNF with broad irregular interrupted white bands from mid cell to tornus, decreasing in size to the apex, UPH apex cell and disc with elongated red spots, margin with red crescents and termen with red spots.

The status of this butterfly species is very common. Male butterfly of this species is common visitor to gardens during sun. This butterfly is recorded from Kanha and Supkhar ranges of park in last week of October during sunny days. Its larvae feed on *Aegle marmelos*, *Citrus* spp., *Glycosmis pentaphylla*, *Murraya koenigii* and *Zanthoxylum rhetsa*.



Fig.3. *Papilio polytes romulus*

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