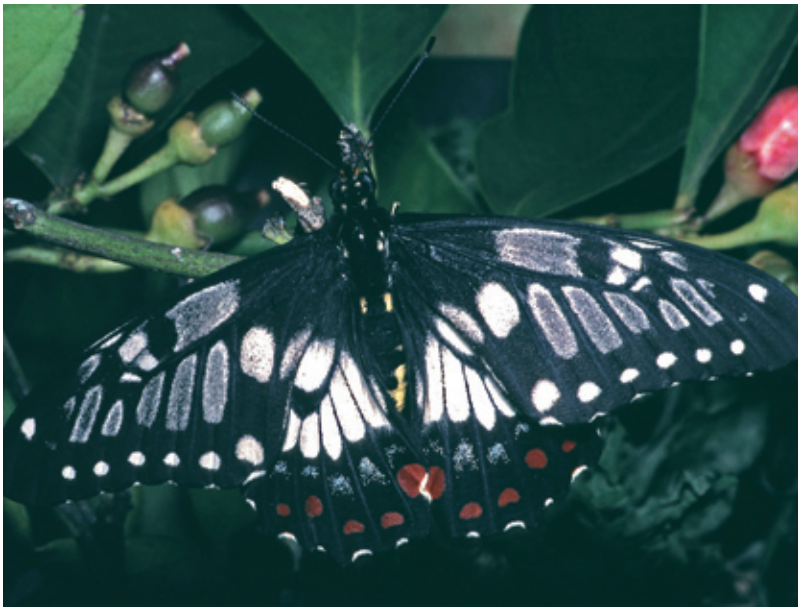
Papilionidae family

Dainty Swallowtail

Papilio anactus

Also known as: Dingy Swallowtail or Small Citrus Butterfly
Abundance in Adelaide area: Common
Flight: Oct – early May
Wingspan: m 67 mm; f 72 mm
Mature larva length: 35 mm



This attractive Swallowtail only breeds locally on cultivated Citrus species. It is well established and in some years is quite numerous in Adelaide suburbs. It can be attracted to any garden if its caterpillar food plants are grown. It will only lay eggs on new growth. Males are often seen patrolling an area around a food plant with a bouyant and dainty flight.

Caterpillar food plants: Native and introduced Citrus species. The caterpillars eat the leaves.

South Australian species: Desert Lime (*Citrus glauca*; previously known as *Eremocitrus*).

Foreign species: Domesticated Citrus species including grape-fruit, lemon, lime, mandarin, and orange.

First found in South Australia in the 1920s, this species has adapted from reliance on a native Citrus species, to the introduced orange, lemon and other Citrus species. With this expanded range of food plants, the butterfly has increased its range through the Murray Valley, to Adelaide and across the southern portions of the state.

Both sexes are similar in appearance. The underside is very similar to the upper side, and the female is distinguished from the male by her larger size and slightly larger red and blue markings on the hind wing.

The mature caterpillar is blue-black in colour, with two rows of orange-yellow spots on its side and numerous small spots of a pale blue to white colour. It has two rows of short, fleshy spines that are not poisonous or dangerous, that run the length of the body along the outer area of its back.

One of the interesting features of the Swallowtail butterflies is the ability of their caterpillars to protrude a forked organ called an 'osmeterium' from behind their head. These are extruded quickly and tend to be brightly coloured. They concentrate volatile chemicals from the plants they eat and these are emitted from this organ. It provides a protective function against predators.

The Dainty Swallowtail's osmeterium is red-orange in colour and smells strongly of citrus.

The pupae are grey or brown and have green patches. They look remarkably similar to citrus bark and are fixed to small branches of the food plant, where they are beautifully camouflaged.