

Corridor Establishment for an Endangered South Florida Butterfly

Thomas C. Emmel
University of Florida

Objectives:

1. Restore and improve the remaining tropical hardwood hammock habitat surrounding the Ocean Reef Golf Course by reintroducing native adult nectar sources and larval host plants in order to create significant natural habitat suitable to maintain and nourish transient adult butterflies and allow for the establishment of new breeding colonies on the northern end of Key Largo.
2. Establish a viable corridor for adult movement and regular gene flow between already existing Schaus Swallowtail butterfly colonies within Biscayne National Park and those present on Key Largo.

Start Date: 1999

Project Duration: 3 years

Total Funding: \$55,000

In order to help save the federally-listed endangered Schaus Swallowtail butterfly from extinction, the Cheeca Lodge and Sombrero Country Club golf courses in the Florida Keys have cooperated with researchers at the University of Florida during the past two years in initiating a corridor of habitat improvement to link up the remaining small and isolated populations of this rare species.

More than 800 suitable nectar plants (for the adults) and 300 host plant trees (for the caterpillars) have been cultured at Gainesville, trucked to the Keys, and planted in the borders or visitor areas of these two golf courses.

The restored areas will provide resting and

refueling stops for Schaus Swallowtail adults moving between their scarce and widely separated existing native habitat areas, which occur to the north and south of these golf courses. This will facilitate gene flow in this endangered species and create a larger "mega-population" of interbreeding adults.

These hospitable habitat areas have also attracted thousands of butterflies and insects of other species, enhancing the ecological food base for resident birds and migratory warbler flocks coming through the Keys each spring and fall.

The positive examples of these two golf courses cooperating in habitat restoration have led to still larger habitat restoration projects being initiated in mid-2001 on the Key Largo Anglers Club grounds adjacent to the Ocean Reef Club in the northern part of Key Largo. Restoration plantings



Golf courses in the Florida Keys are playing an important part in the conservation effort to save this beautiful butterfly species.

are being requested by many private land owners, as well as the Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge, on sites throughout the Florida Keys and the south Florida mainland. The favorable environmental impact is currently being measured, but is already clearly considerable.



The Schaus Swallowtail butterfly.

Summary Points

- Safe Harbor Agreement was negotiated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for each golf course.
- Nectar source plants have been purchased for the golf courses and planting is planned after transplants have reached acceptable size.
- Public displays are being prepared regarding the need for the project, a description of the endangered Schaus Swallowtail, and the Wildlife Links Program.
- Schaus Swallowtail monitoring will continue in year three of the project.