

The Tiger Diaries by Cathy Butcher, Wisconsin Master Naturalist

May 11, 2018

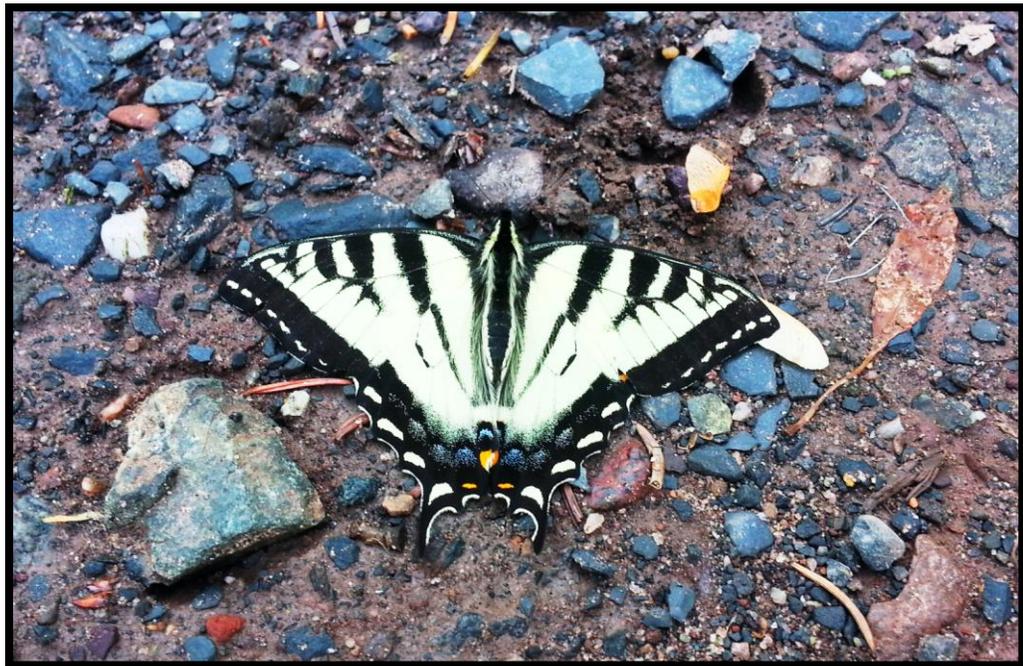
Paul and I arrived today for our three month stay Up North. As usual, after unpacking, we headed to the Gile Flowage to see what our beloved wilderness spot looked like after a nine month hiatus. We saw beauty!

May 24, 2018

I'm almost certain I saw a tiger today on our drive around the Gile Flowage! There will be more soon. I'll be prepared next time. I intend to shoot one.

May 26, 2018

Tigers have suddenly appeared in large numbers! They race alongside the forest's edge so fast I can hardly shoot them. Paul came around a curve on Island Lake Road and there were a large number gathered right in the middle. They scattered, he missed them. After we passed by I looked back and saw them returning so I requested he pull over. I jumped out and ran back with camera in hand to try and get a good shot of these beautiful butterflies congregating in a wet spot of soil to sip moisture rich in minerals and salts. I knew I would be photographing male butterflies since females do not usually take part in this activity known as "puddling".



June 19, 2018

The flowering spreading dogbane seems to be a highly popular nectar plant with the tigers. I'm still seeing lots of these large beauties flitting about. Eggs have probably been laid and hatched by now. The season here is short so the caterpillars will be busy eating their host plants and going through several stages of growth and molting so they can be ready to pupate and hibernate over the winter.



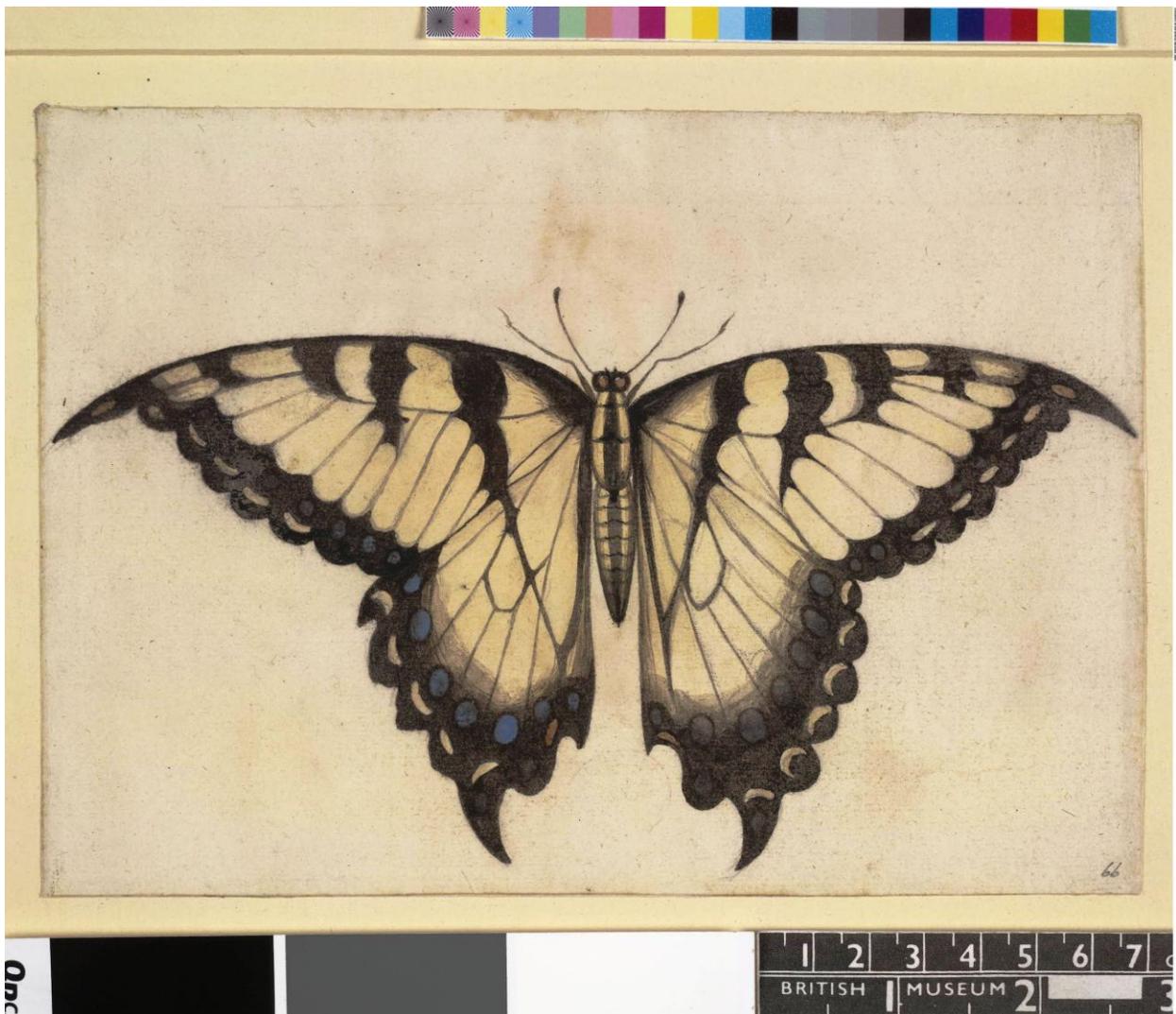
July 21, 2018

I think it's been about two weeks since I last saw a tiger swallowtail around the Gile Flowage. Other species of butterflies are now more prevalent.

Over the years of visiting northern Wisconsin, the spectacular tiger swallowtail butterflies have been grabbing my attention every May when they appear in large numbers. In Florida, where I live the other nine months, I am fortunate to see them for what seems like most of the year. However, during my research to learn more about the very common Eastern tiger swallowtail butterfly, I discovered the surprising fact that the tigers I was shooting Up North are actually a different species from the tigers seen back in Florida. The northern species is called Canadian tiger swallowtail. I was unaware of any obvious differences. They looked the same. So I thought I'd share some of this interesting information with other casual butterfly observers out there who might be ready to learn a little more about this group of lovely butterflies.

Swallowtails come in many species. Their range covers most parts of North America, Canada, and Alaska. So I'm betting that most people have seen some kind of swallowtail butterfly in their life.

The first known painting of a tiger swallowtail was a watercolor done by Englishman John White in 1587. White participated in Sir Walter Raleigh's expeditions to explore Virginia for future colonizing. Part of his job was to sketch the landscape, animals, and native people of the New World. He titled the painting "Mamankanois" which was thought to be the Native American word for "butterfly". All of his surviving paintings are now in the British Museum's collection. In 1758 the Eastern tiger swallowtail was assigned a binary name, *Papilio glauca*, by Carl Linnaeus who devised the two-part naming system used to classify life forms. Since 1906 the northern species, that I was photographing, was considered to be a sub-species of the Eastern tiger swallowtail. Then in 1991, studies and genetic testing confirmed enough differences between the two that allowed assignment of a new species name, *P.canadensis*, now commonly called the Canadian tiger swallowtail.



The common name, tiger swallowtail, has been used for 150 years. It's obvious why they would be commonly referred to as tigers since they share a similar tawny-gold color and stripes with the big cats, but I'm guessing that the second part of the name was a comparison of their shape to an 1850's gentleman's coat known as a swallowtail coat or "tails", cut high at the front waist with two long tails left suspended down the back.

Physical differences between the Eastern and Canadian species are so slight that I cannot tell them apart unless I'm comparing photos side by side, certainly not while chasing one down the road. The Canadian tigers are smaller but their range may be the easiest determining factor for identification. They survive in regions with harsh winters and short growing seasons. The chrysalis has the ability to hibernate. In May a butterfly emerges, quickly locates a mate, and produces one generation only. The Eastern tigers live in areas of warmer habitats. They can produce two or more generations during a season. Also, each larva has a favorite food source that the other cannot tolerate. Birches (*Betula spp.*) and quaking aspen trees (*Populus tremuloides*) are favored by the Canadian tiger larvae while the tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) is a favorite food of the Eastern tiger larvae. Another unusual difference is that female Eastern tiger butterflies have a black form while the Canadian tigers do not.

Their life cycle begins as a single egg laid upon a leaf of a host plant which includes aspen, birch, and black cherry in the Gile Flowage area. If you are out looking for young tiger larvae on aspen leaves, expect the unexpected. They have a camouflage technique that protects them from being noticed by predators. They look like brown and white bird droppings. Now who would want to eat that? As they mature into lime green caterpillars another set of self-protection tools develops. The tiger babies now have colorful, scary fake eyes on the sides of their head and when feeling threatened they display what appears to be a forked-tongue and emit an odor that predators must find repulsive. I'm sure most predators flee in horror at this sudden confusing transformation from tasty plump worm to evil-eyed smelly snake thing.

Once the caterpillar fully matures it moves down the tree trunk and forms into a chrysalis on nearby leaf litter or the trunk itself. Over time it develops within the chrysalis into a butterfly and when seasonal conditions are right it will break free, rest and allow its wings to unfold and fill with blood, and then fly off in search of a mate to begin the cycle all over again.

So, come next May, be prepared to watch for tigers on the loose around the Gile Flowage and enjoy!

Photo credits: Cathy Butcher.

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