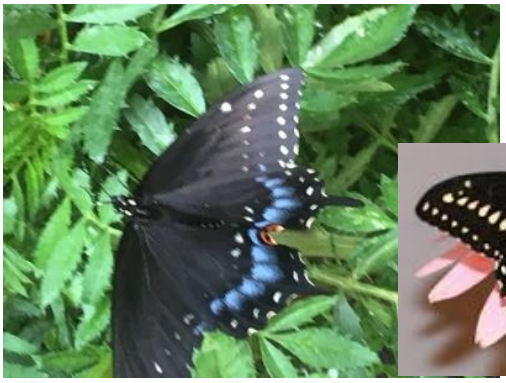
Spectacular Butterflies

While Bees and Monarchs are the iconic targets of the National Pollinator Task Force, the third objective of the group was to "Restore or enhance seven million acres of land for pollinators over the next five years." Every backyard pollinator garden contributes to achieving this goal. A pollinator garden doesn't just offer visually beautiful flowers, it attracts some spectacular butterflies as well. The Tiger Swallowtail, Black Swallowtail, and Red Spotted Purple are frequently seen in Hershey's Mill.

The Eastern Tiger Swallowtail uses Tulip Poplar and Cherry trees as host plants for larvae—both abundant in Hershey's Mill. The males are always yellow with tiger stripes but the females may resemble the males or be black.

The Eastern Black Swallowtail is also dimorphic with the males having extensive rows of yellow spots while blue spots dominate on the female. The parsley family of plants is the larval food source for the Black Swallowtail –including wild (Queen Anne's Lace) and cultivated (carrot, celery, dill, fennel, parsley) plants. Striking larvae can be found in the Hershey's Mill Garden area. Black Swallowtails produce few eggs so they are not a concern as a pest; in fact, populations are in significant decline. Gardeners please share your carrots. Note the tails typical of swallowtail butterflies.



Red Spotted Purple is abundant and sometimes mistaken for a swallowtail but it does not have tails. Its larval food source can be willow, poplar, cherry, or oak. Note that the Red Spotted Purple in the photo is attracted to the ground. Pollinators need water and they also need nutrients. Butterflies obtain minerals from ground puddles where soil constituents have been dissolved especially nitrogen. You can provide for "puddling" by making shallow pools in soil that all butterflies will use.

Adult butterflies seek nectar from the same flowers as bees but they do see red. Wild columbine, cardinal flower and bee balm are good choices of native perennials that attract butterflies.