

## THE SWALLOWTAIL BUTTERFLY

### *Papilio machaon* (Linnaeus, 1758)

The Swallowtail (*Papilio machaon*) is one of the most common species in the Butterfly Garden and undoubtedly one of the most beautiful in Portugal.

**Description:** The dorsal view of the butterfly has a yellow color with black stripes and a red spot surrounded by a blue circle in the hindwings. The ventral side presents a pale tone. The early stage of the caterpillar looks like little bird droppings; this feature gives the caterpillar a better protection against predators by reducing the risk of predation. After molting a few times, the caterpillar presents a bright green color with black bands and orange spots.

**Distribution:** In Portugal this species is scattered throughout the territory. But it is also found in the rest of Europe, North Africa and Asia.

**Biology:** The swallowtail has three generations per year in the Mediterranean region flying from March to October. Females lay eggs on young leaves of rue (*Ruta graveolensis*) or fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) and caterpillars hatch about a week later. The larvae are active during the day feeding for about 3 weeks in the host plant. If disturbed, they show a pair of bright orange scent glands, the *osmeterium*, which emits a strong and unpleasant smell repelling potential predators. The adults hatch three weeks after the formation of the chrysalis, or after the winter cold months hibernation stage.

**Threats:** Habitat fragmentation, landscape abandonment with increase of shrub cover, pollution.



For this month object we want to highlight not only the Swallowtail, but also some scientific illustrations that have been made in the Butterfly House about this species.

The objects and works exposed represent:

1. An entomological box with the adult swallowtail and their host plant rue.
2. Illustrations by Teodora Boneva, that represent the life cycle of the swallowtail and its host plants. (i) Caterpillar; (ii) Caterpillar showing the *osmeterium*; (iii) Chrysalis; (iv) Butterfly; (v) Rue; (vi) Fennel.