

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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TWO FLORIDA BUTTERFLIES MAY BECOME FIRST INSECTS LISTED AS THREATENED SPECIES

The Schaus swallowtail and Bahaman swallowtail butterflies may become the first insects to be officially listed as threatened species by Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Schaus swallowtail is found only in the Florida Keys from Biscayne National Monument south to lower Matecumbe Key. The Bahaman swallowtail is found in the Florida Keys within Biscayne National Monument and in the Bahama Islands. Both are protected within the Monument, a National Park Service area.

The proposed listing recently appeared in the Federal Register. The two swallowtails, however, are not among 41 species of butterflies that were named in an earlier Federal Register notice as being proposed for studies to determine if any should be classified as threatened or endangered.

Information concerning the latest proposal has been solicited from the Governor of Florida, and other interested persons are invited to submit written comments, suggestions, objections, and factual information concerning the proposal to the Director (FWS/LE), Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240. All comments received within 90 days of the Federal Register notice will be considered.

The Schaus swallowtail has striking yellow bands on a brown background. It once inhabited the area from Miami to lower Matecumbe, but its numbers have been greatly reduced in recent years by over-collecting of the insect in its caterpillar stage. The taking of adult butterflies, however, is not considered as serious a threat. A special exception within the proposal would allow the collecting of adult Schaus swallowtails on Key Largo for non-commercial purposes as long as State laws are met. Other major threats to the butterfly include the commercial development of Key Largo and the possibility of a hurricane or a freeze that could eliminate the entire isolated population.

Similar circumstances surround the Bahaman swallowtail, which is identified by the broad yellow band crossing its black wings. The United States population is found only in Biscayne National Monument. Formerly the species also occurred near South Miami, but has not been seen there recently, probably because of development. These butterflies are highly desired by collectors and until 1972 they had been seen only once or twice in the Florida Keys. In 1972 a colony of the butterflies was discovered on Elliot Key within Biscayne National Monument.

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