

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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## TWO BUTTERFLIES ARE FIRST INSECTS ON THREATENED LIST

Two Florida butterflies, called "living jewels" by collectors have become the first insects officially to be listed under the Endangered Species Act, Keith M. Schreiner, Associate Director of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, announced today.

"The determination that these two butterflies are 'threatened species' is particularly disturbing because the real name of the game in endangered species is the conservation of ecosystems," Schreiner said, "and some of the best indicators of the health of an ecosystem are insects. They are essential building blocks--the pollinators of plants and the base of many food chains."

The two species, the Schaus swallowtail and Bahama swallowtail, are among the most beautiful butterflies in the United States. They are similar in appearance to the giant swallowtail found throughout the South. The intricate patterns on their 4-inch wings, with vivid hues of yellow, orange, blue, and dark brown, make them two of the U.S. butterflies most desired by collectors. There are reports of their selling for as much as \$25 each.

Some biologists fear that collecting of the insects in the caterpillar stage may be a reason for their decreased population in recent years. The taking of adult butterflies is not considered as serious a threat since they lay eggs shortly after emerging from the pupal stage. About a month later they die.

The major threat to both species has been the extensive commercial development of the Florida Keys. Much of their habitat has been destroyed and today populations are concentrated on several Keys of the Biscayne National Monument under control and protection of the National Park Service. There also is some concern that unregulated collection of the immature stages of these butterflies has contributed to their threatened status.

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