

The Return of the Chequered Swallowtail

to Glenthorne National Park-Ityamaiitpinna Yarta

Over a hundred and fifty years ago the area that is now Glenthorne National Park-Ityamaiitpinna Yarta started to degrade as a result of extensive land clearance. Over the years many plants and wildlife have been lost, but things are now beginning to change. Wildlife, such as the Chequered Swallowtail, are starting to return.

What is a Chequered Swallowtail?

The Chequered Swallowtail (*Papilio demoleus sthenelus*) is a striking butterfly with a wingspan of 7.5cm. When first hatched caterpillars resemble bird droppings before turning green as they mature. These butterflies only occur in areas where their host plant grows such as the Tall Scurf-pea (*Cullen australasicum*), as it's the only plant their caterpillars eat. Their chrysalis can hatch within three weeks or can take up to 10 months.

Why did they vanish from Glenthorne?

Chequered Swallowtails migrate from the northern part of SA and are common wherever their host plant grows. However sightings in Adelaide are becoming less frequent due to a loss of habitat. It is not known when the last Tall Scurf-pea existed in Glenthorne National Park-Ityamaiitpinna Yarta, but it may have been over a hundred years ago meaning Chequered Swallowtails haven't had a lifecycle in the park for over a century.

When did they come back?

Revegetation of the Tall-scurf Pea in Glenthorne National Park-Ityamaiitpinna Yarta began in 2020 and within twelve months, adult Chequered Swallowtails could be seen visiting the plants. How the butterflies knew is a mystery. In early 2022, hundreds of caterpillars were spotted on the leaves of Tall Scurf-peas, many of them forming a chrysalis and hatching before winter – others choosing to wait out the cold months (known as overwintering).

It is hoped that with ongoing efforts from rangers, ecologists, school groups, and community volunteers (such as the Friends of Glenthorne) that other species can begin to return and thrive.



Chequered Swallowtail
Papilio demoleus sthenelus



Find out more about the Chequered Swallowtail at natureplaysa.org.au and more about visiting Glenthorne National Park-Ityamaiitpinna Yarta at parks.sa.gov.au.

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