

FLORIDA'S OFFICIAL STATE BUTTERFLY

ZEBRA LONGWING

(*Heliconius charithonia*)



The slow, graceful flight of the **Zebra longwings** is seen throughout the state, but this common Florida butterfly is anything but ordinary!

- Zebra Longwings are the only butterflies known to feed on pollen as well as on nectar on a variety of flowers. They prefer long, tubular flowers like Firebush (*Hamelia patens*) and Tropical sage (*Salvia coccinea*), as well as Spanish needles (*Bidens alba*) that allow them to rest while feeding. They are also especially fond of flowers in the Verbena family, and Blue porterweed (*Stachytapheta jamaicensis*).
- They collect pollen on the outside of their proboscis and excrete stomach acids through the proboscis onto the gathered pollen. After the process of external digestion is complete, the Zebra Longwing drinks down the nutrient-rich liquefied pollen. This special diet is probably why they have a long lifespan of about 6 months, as compared to a more usual one month for other butterfly species.
- Zebra Longwing adults roost communally at night in groups of up to 60 adults for safety from predators.
- Butterflies lay their eggs on specific plants that they know their caterpillars will eat. Zebra females can be found laying their eggs in groups on the newest growth of various passion vines (Maypop, Corky-stem). The bright yellow eggs are generally found in clusters from just a few to several dozen.

