

Walking with the Butterflies

Large Tree Nymph Scientific name: *Idea leuconoe*

The large tree nymph, the official prefectural butterfly of Okinawa, is one of the largest in Japan. It has distinctive mottled black-and-white coloring and a languorous, delicate way of flapping its wings as it flies, earning it the Japanese nickname “noblewoman of the south.” The chrysalis has a beautiful golden hue, like a piece of jewelry. The larvae feed on leaves from the vine *Parsonsia alboflavescens*. Because the vine is toxic to other species, it represents a guaranteed supply of food; because it makes the butterflies themselves toxic, it provides protection from predators. These butterflies can be seen almost year-round on Zamami Island, but particularly in the summer, at roadsides bordering dark patches of forest.

Ceylon Blue Glassy Tiger Scientific name: *Ideopsis similis*

These butterflies feature a beautiful pattern of black and pale blue-green on their wings. They are known for attaching in groups to tree branches and vines during the winter. Because the larvae eat *Vincetoxicum tanakae*, a poisonous plant, they grow up with toxins in their bodies that protect them from predators. Their gorgeously colored wings actually serve to alert predators to their toxicity. On Zamami Island they can be encountered almost year-round at roadsides bordering the forest, and in brighter patches of the forest.

Great Orange-Tip Scientific name: *Hebomoia glaucippe*

The upper sides of the wings of these butterflies are mostly white and cream, with orange at the tips. These powerful fliers move swiftly with their wings held open in a V shape. The larvae eat the leaves of the *Crateva formosensis* tree. On Zamami Island they can be encountered in gullies and alongside streams year-round, except for a short period in winter.

Striped Blue Crow Scientific name: *Euploea mulciber*

The male and female of this butterfly species have different colored wings. The tips of the male’s wings glow with a lustrous blue-purple color. The larvae eat *Ficus erecta* and *Ficus microcarpa* (Moraceae family) and *Parsonsia alboflavescens* and *Trachelospermum asiaticum* (Apocynaceae family). On Zamami Island, they can be encountered almost year-round at roadsides bordering the forest.

Common Mormon Scientific name: *Papilio polytes*

The Japanese name means “white-band swallowtail butterfly,” and both the male and the female have black wings marked by a transverse white band. The larvae feed on the *Citrus depressa* and *Tetradium glabrifolium* of the Rutaceae family. On Zamami Island, common Mormon butterflies can be encountered year-round on bright forest roads and grassy open spaces near where people live, except for a short period in winter.