

# Butterflies and Native Plants

by Eve Hannahs

## ZEBRA LONGWING *Heliconius charitonius*

Species of *Passiflora*, the passion vine, are the larval foods of the Zebra Longwing butterfly. The caterpillar is easily identified by its presence on host plants and its unusual appearance: its white body has transverse stripes with six rows of black branching spines arising from black dots.

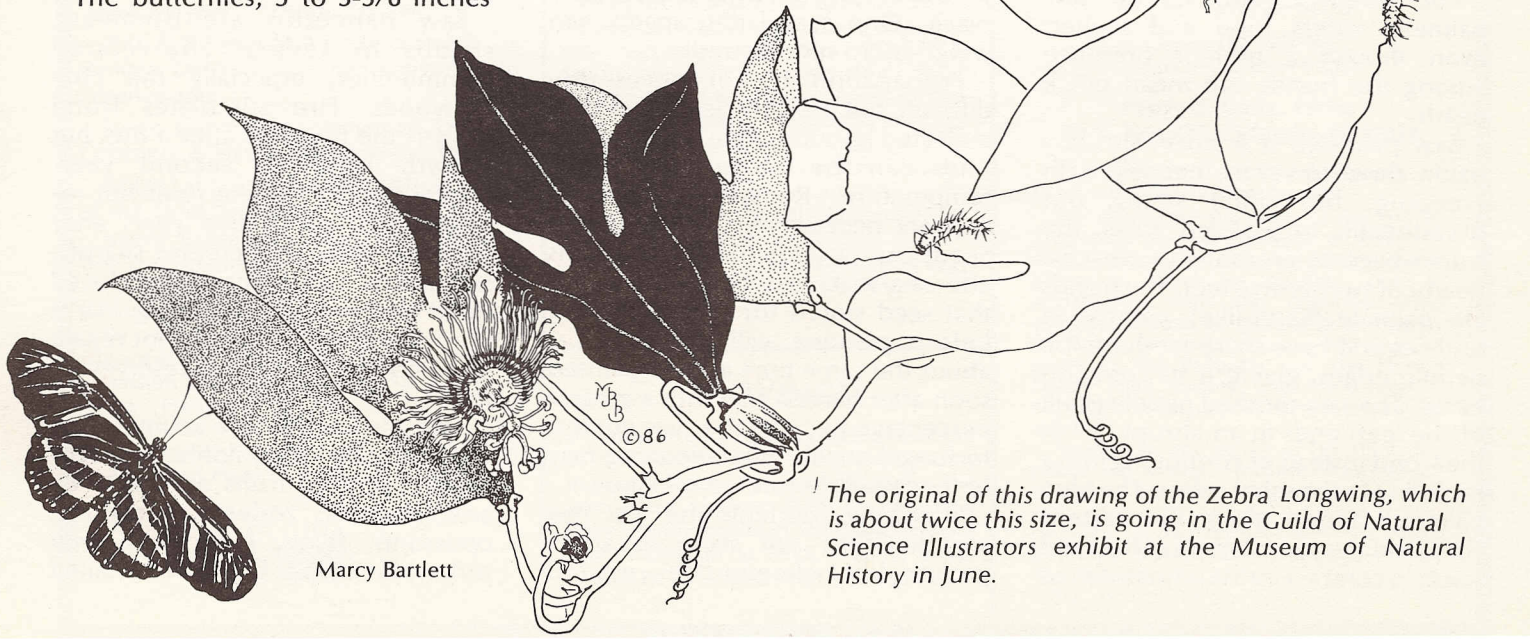
Yellow-ribbed eggs are deposited singly on tender plant growth, spaced so that tiny hatchlings will have ample food. Some species of *Passiflora* have developed their own tiny defense against the caterpillars—they may have growths on leaves and in their axils that appear to be eggs. The butterfly, assuming that those areas are “taken”, flies on to another site to lay its eggs. Score one for the plants!

The butterflies, 3 to 3-3/8 inches

long, can be confused with no other. The elongated black velvet-like wings are crossed with yellow stripes. Underneath they have similar markings with crimson dots at the base of the wings. They are slow flyers, flaunting their brilliant markings with no fear of predation, because their larval diet makes them unpalatable. At night they roost in colonies; this behavior is said to be another protective device, as collectively they have a repellent odor.

The neotropical family Heliconiidae has three representatives in Florida. In addition to the Zebra, there are the

Gulf fritillary, *Agraulis vanillae*, that has silver spots on the underside but is not closely related to the true fritillaries; and Julia, *Dryas julia*, of south Florida. All feed on the passion vine in the larval stage.



Marcy Bartlett

The original of this drawing of the Zebra Longwing, which is about twice this size, is going in the Guild of Natural Science Illustrators exhibit at the Museum of Natural History in June.