



# On The Wing

Newsletter of the Tennessee Valley Chapter,  
North American Butterfly Association

June 2008

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## FOURTH OF JULY BUTTERFLY COUNT TIME IS HERE!

NABA sponsors butterfly counts all over North America each year. Participants conduct a one-day census within a 15 mile diameter circle, which remains the same from year to year. Counts in each circle are usually done around the same time each year as well. For 2007, the 33rd year of organized butterfly counts, NABA published 447 counts from 48 states in the U.S., 31 counts from Canada and 5 counts from Mexico. No counts were reported from Kentucky, Hawaii or North Dakota. 8 states, including Alabama, reported only one count.

Count results provide abundant information about distribution and relative population sizes of butterflies. Comparisons across years can be used to monitor changes in populations and study the effects of weather and habitat changes.

Of the 483 counts published for 2007, 4,119 observers (the sum of observers on each count...many folks do more than one), tallied 508,341 adult butterflies in 7,388 total party hours with 4,048 of those party hours on foot.

In the U.S. and Canada, observers reported 415 species on 4th of July counts, including 28 new continental record high counts. (*Our very own Tennessee River Gorge count set a new continental high record of 132 for Diana Fritillary, which was recorded on only 8 counts in 2007.*)

For the first time in 2007, seasonal counts were reported outside the 4th of July count period (which is usually June and July). 161 species were tallied on Spring counts, including 2 record high counts. 204 species were reported on Fall counts, including 2 record high counts.

As you can see, this is a huge citizen science project where ordinary people can contribute significant data about butterflies. You are invited to help this summer!

### 4th of July counts scheduled in this area:

**Sat., June 7 - Tennessee River Gorge, TN**

**Sat., June 21 - Soddy-Daisy, TN**

**Sat., June 28 - Lookout Mountain, GA**

**Sat., July 12 - Catoosa-Whitfield Co., GA**

**Sat., July 26 - Stevenson, AL**

Bill Haley is the compiler for all these counts. To participate, please contact him a week before each count to learn where and when to meet. His e-mail is [wgh@tnaqua.org](mailto:wgh@tnaqua.org), work phone is 785-4056, or 1 800 262-0695, ext. 4056, or you may call his home phone (423) 756-4106.

## MAY 4 FIELD TRIP REPORT:

Our very first field trip was held Sunday afternoon, May 4 in the Blue Blazes Trail area of Moccasin Bend. Nine people attended: Vaughn Trentham, Bill Haley, Jennifer Taylor, Kyle Waggoner, David Spicer, Tanya Jordan, Susan Schott, Libby Wolfe and Deborah Beeding.

A bright sunny sky, temperature of 76 degrees F, and light wind made for a great butterfly day!

We ended the day with 24 species of butterflies. The Eastern Pine Elfin was the best find of the outing. Over 25 Red-banded Hairstreaks were seen.

Juvenal's Duskywing and Falcate Orangetip, both single-brooded early spring fliers quite common in this area, were not seen, indicating we may already be past their annual early spring flight period.

### Species seen included:

Eastern Tiger Swallowtail

Spicebush Swallowtail

Orange Sulphur

Cloudless Sulphur

Sleepy Orange

Red-banded Hairstreak

Eastern Pine Elfin

Eastern Tailed-Blue

American Snout

Variiegated Fritillary

Pearl Crescent

Question Mark

American Lady (both adult and caterpillars)

Red Admiral

Common Buckeye

Red-spotted Purple

Viceroy

Hackberry Emperor

Carolina Satyr

Silver-spotted Skipper

Common Checkered Skipper

Sachem

Clouded Skipper

Zabulon Skipper



Carolina Satyr



Eastern Tailed Blue

Photos on this page taken by David Spicer, 5/4/08:

Top left: Zabulon Skipper (male)

**MONTHLY CALENDAR:**

**Tues., June 24: Monthly meeting**

**7:00PM, Tennessee Aquarium, River Journey building, Discovery Classroom**

We'll talk about the first two butterfly counts of the year and also look at upcoming counts. We fully expect to be an "official" chapter with NABA (over 25 members) by this meeting, so it will be time to nominate and elect a slate of officers. If you would like to be considered for an officer position, please contact Bill Haley, wgh@tnaqua.org, (423) 785-4056, or Julia Gregory jmg@tnaqua.org, (423) 785-4054. *Please enter through the gift shop entrance. As you face the building, this entrance is to your left.*

**4th of July Counts:**

**Saturday, June 7:**

**14th annual Tennessee River Gorge, TN**

*Four choices:*

- 1). Sign up for Tennessee Aquarium members program "Butterflies in the Tennessee River Gorge". Call (423) 267-FISH to register. Participants will meet at the Pot Point Field Station in the Tennessee River Gorge from 10:00-12:30 Eastern to survey butterflies in the riverside meadows. Leader: Bill Haley. Members: \$5, non-members: \$8. If you wish to order a Golden Guide "Butterflies and Moths" please add \$5. Your NABA fee is covered in the cost of the program.
- 2). Call Bill to be assigned an area within the count circle to cover at your own pace. At least one member of each party will need to be good at butterfly identification. \$3.00 per person to NABA. Collect fees, names and addresses!
- 3). 1:00pm. Meet Bill at the Signal Mountain Bi-Lo after his members program and caravan to survey other areas. \$3.00 per person to NABA.
- 4). Be a garden watcher if you live within the count circle. Call Bill for guidelines for garden watchers. No fee to NABA.

*Dress for the weather. Wear sneakers or boots (NOT sandals or flip-flops), and a hat. Sunblock and bug spray are a good idea. Be sure to bring binoculars if you have them. Remember, NO collecting on any count or field trip!*

**Saturday, June 21:**

**12th annual Soddy-Daisy, TN**

**Meet 9:30am in the old Soddy-Daisy WalMart parking lot near the intersection of Sequoyah Rd. and Old Dayton Pike. Leader: Bill Haley (423) 785-4056. Call for directions or other info.**

Join Bill to help explore some good butterfly territory on Bakewell Mountain, where we'll hope for Gorgone Checkerspot and Diana Fritillary, as well as many other "goodies". We will also butterfly several other areas around Soddy-Daisy, Bakewell and Sale Creek. \$3 NABA fee per person.

**Saturday, June 28:**

**9th annual Lookout Mountain, GA**

**Meet 9:30am on South Broad Street in large parking lot past Krystal, heading towards Lookout Mtn. (used to be Bi-Lo). Leader: Bill Haley**

This count takes place mostly in Chattanooga Valley, but a few areas are covered on Lookout Mountain. Center of count circle is the intersection of Hwy. 193 and Hwy. 136. \$3 NABA fee per person. Call Bill for more information.



*American Lady caterpillar on pussytoes, larval host plant.*

**LARVAE OF THE MONTH:**

American Lady caterpillars are among the easiest to find of all caterpillars if you know what to look for. They make a "tent" at the top of their host plants, pussytoes and rabbit tobacco, tying flower tops together with a silk they produce. They hide within this "tent" to avoid predators. David Spicer took a photo

on our May 4 field trip after Bill Haley opened up a tent to look for the caterpillar inside. In a small patch of pussytoes, we spotted three such tents, but didn't disturb the other residents. This caterpillar likely patched up the damage quickly after we left. Only one adult American Lady, *Vanessa virginiensis*, was spotted on the field trip. It can be fascinating to search for the larval stages of butterflies, and if you plant a butterfly garden, be sure to supply some host plants for them to eat!



*Eastern Pine Elfin*

**BEST BUTTERFLY OF THE FIRST FIELD TRIP!**

The Eastern Pine Elfin, *Callophrys niphon*, was a new butterfly for several folks on our field trip. Lucky that David Spicer was at the right place at the right time to snap this photo! They are somewhat uncommon in this area, and a good find. It will be a new county record for Hamilton County.

## Around The Puddle

by Bill Haley

### Are Skippers Impossible to Identify?

Are skippers impossible to identify? YES.....and no. It depends on the skipper, and on your level of patience. Some are easy as pie, some are the very devil. Sometimes, after staring at the critter and thumbing through our field guide for the third time, you just have to say "I don't know."

Many new butterfly watchers, and lots of veteran ones as well, are scared to death of skippers. They throw up their arms in surrender when confronted with yet another skipper butterfly to identify. These little butterflies are often referred to as "the sparrows of the butterfly world" because there are so many different kinds and unfortunately, many are drab colored and look pretty much alike. There are lots of brown and yellow skippers.

All veteran butterfly counters hope for skippers on count day. They can be a blessing on a butterfly count. A good variety of skippers is the difference between a ho-hum species list and a great day's total. Some folks love skippers!

That is IF you can identify them! If you can't they can be the bane of your existence.

As luck would have it, David Spicer snapped shots of three skipper species that are fairly easy to identify. As you'll see, they are very cute, furry little beasts when seen up close.

The first one, **Zabulon Skipper**, *Poanes zabulon*, can often be identified by its behavior. The males are often seen along trails or roadsides perched prominently on top of the tallest weed. From this vantage point, they'll fly out to intercept any insect that flies into their airspace, probably hoping for a female Zabulon. This also asserts their territorial rights, because they sometimes do this with humans too, usually returning to their original spot after zipping around for a bit. The males are quite colorful.



Male Zabulons, on the underside, have bright yellow hindwings, speckled with brown spots around the edges, which is pretty distinctive. If they partially open their wings when resting, the hindwing is bright orange with darker brown border.



Next up is the **Clouded Skipper**, *Lerema accius*. This one gives many folks trouble if they see the upper wings. Dark brown with small white spots, and very similar to some other skippers. The underside offers a pretty good field mark. The hindwing has a triangular-shaped dark band



across the middle, which you hopefully can see in this shot. Near the body is dark brown, then a lighter band, then the dark triangular band, then lighter at the outer edge of the hindwing.

Last is the **Common Checkered-Skipper**, *Pyrgus communis*, a stunning gun metal blue-gray, black and white checkered butterfly. It is usually found in open field type habitats, and likes open white clover lawns. It is an open-winged skipper, usually landing with wings spread. The identification of his species used to be a slam dunk in the Eastern United States. Unfortunately, now a southwestern species, the **White Checkered-Skipper**, seems to be invading. Kenn Kaufmann's field guide states the two species cannot be identified positively without dissection, which we won't be doing. (I'm still going to call them Common Checkered-Skippers!)



**NOTABLE BUTTERFLY SIGHTINGS:**

**Hoary Edge, *Echalarus lyciades***

We saw quite a few Hoary Edge skippers on our Prentice Cooper field trip on May 24. Note the wide white patch at the outer edge of the hindwing when the wings are closed. The only other species it could be confused with is the Silver-spotted Skipper, which has a silvery-white patch in the middle of the hindwing. On May 21, Tanya Jordan and Bill Haley observed a female Hoary Edge lay eggs on a plant in the tick trefoil family along Sulphur Branch Rd. in the Prentice Cooper State Forest. The butterfly flew low, gently touching all the surrounding vegetation and Bill remarked it seemed to be hunting for a place to oviposit. Sure enough, it briefly landed on a plant right in front of them and when Bill turned over the leaf, he found a freshly laid egg. Tanya took the photo to the right before the same female flew back to the plant and laid another egg! (photo at bottom).



May 10: Libby Wolfe and Deborah Beeding went to Bakewell Mountain and Sale Creek in search of butterflies. 25 species were seen. Highlights were several Gorgone Checkerspots and 1 Baltimore Checkerspot.

Bill Haley bought a spicebush at the Reflection Riding spring plant sale, hoping to attract Spicebush Swallowtails. On May 24, his wife Candy spotted a Spicebush Swallowtail checking out the plant. It briefly touched down and laid an egg on the underside of a leaf. Bill later found a total of 4 eggs on his spicebush. Plant host plants and the butterflies WILL find them.



**SPECIES SEEN ON THE MAY 24 FIELD TRIP:**

Zebra Swallowtail, Spicebush Swallowtail, E. Tiger Swallowtail, Orange Sulphur (both white and orange color forms), Sleepy Orange, Gray Hairstreak, E. Tailed Blue, Spring Azure, Variegated Fritillary, Silvery Checkerspot, Pearl Crescent, American Lady, Red-spotted Purple, Gemmed Satyr, Carolina Satyr, Little Wood Satyr, Silver-spotted Skipper, Hoary Edge, Zabulon Skipper (both male and female).



Stephen Johnson and Jeff Basham sent in a good list of butterflies they'd seen May 6, no info on locations, but 48 species, a very nice total!. Highlights included: 2 Eastern Pine Elfins, 35 Juniper Hairstreaks, 2 White M Hairstreaks, 750 Red-banded Hairstreaks, 6 Reversed Roadside Skippers and 1 Pepper and Salt Skipper.