



Photo by Jack Gentle

**NO CHAPTER MEETING
IN NOVEMBER**
Enjoy your Thanksgiving!

FALL AND WINTER BUTTERFLY CHALLENGE:

Here is a challenge for all butterfly watchers to undertake from early November through late January. It is easy to document butterflies during the warmer months, but how many can you find in late fall and winter?

I would love to report in this newsletter any butterfly sightings you make this time of year, so be sure to e-mail me at wgh@tnaqua.org. In many ways, these could be the most interesting and important records we collect all year long. Not many people are thinking about butterflies during the winter months, so records are scarce. Keep your eyes open and see what you can find. You might be surprised how tough these seemingly fragile insects really are!

Butterflies overwinter in all life stages: egg, larva, pupa and adult. All of these life stages are fair game for observers, so be sure to send in those reports for publication.

The beautiful photo at the top of this page was sent in by Jack Gentle. Jack says he usually only gets a handful of great shots out of dozens he takes, and he certainly succeeded here. I thought it was fitting that the butterfly was perched on a dried seed head. A few years back, while participating in the Nickajack Christmas Bird Count on a sunny December 31, we found three of these in a field in the Sequatchie Valley, along with a couple of American Snouts. Can you identify this butterfly?

- Bill Haley

On The Wing

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North American Butterfly Association*

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Editor: Bill Haley, wgh@tnaqua.org

NOV. FIELD OPPORTUNITY:

TUES., NOV. 11:

HAWKWATCHING (AND MAYBE BUTTERFLY WATCHING) ON SODDY MOUNTAIN HAWK LOOKOUT, MEET 10:00AM AT LOOKOUT. LEADER: BILL HALEY (785-4056 OR 756-4106)

Have you ever wondered if butterflies might be found at 1200 feet elevation on the side of the mountain in Soddy-Daisy in mid-November?

No? Well, if you are curious, you are certainly invited to join Bill as he monitors migrant hawks. This date is being advertised as a Tennessee Ornithological Society field trip, but if you plan to go, please call Bill beforehand. His dad has been in the hospital with serious health problems and Bill's schedule could change, making him unable to be on the lookout that day.

Red-tailed Hawks, Northern Harriers and Bald Eagles migrate at this time of year, so be sure to bring some binoculars. Most migrant birds of prey aren't close! The view over the TN Valley is gorgeous too!

Weather is a big factor. A warm sunny day might be better for butterflies than migrant hawks! Forget butterflies if it is windy and cold, but that can be when the hawks show up. Feeling adventurous?

Dress for the weather, wear a hat, bring binoculars, a lawn chair to sit in and sunscreen if it is sunny. Something to drink and a snack are good ideas too.

DIRECTIONS:

- From Chattanooga, take Hwy. 27N past Soddy-Daisy;
- You will go across a causeway over Soddy Lake and then the road splits, stay left at split - Hwy. 111N;
- Continue on Hwy. 111N to top of mountain;
- Take first exit atop mountain, Jones Gap Rd.;
- Turn left on Jones Gap Rd. and continue a little over 2 miles on this very curvy road;
- When road takes a sharp right turn, you will turn left, (this is a continuation of Jones Gap). You will see a house directly in front of you at this curve.
- You should see a dead end sign on this road.
- Follow it to the end (less than 1/4 mile), park and walk up bank. You are there!
- DO NOT continue around the curve on Burchard Road!!!

Cancelled if raining or completely overcast.

Around The Puddle

by Bill Haley



Sub-freezing temperatures on an early morning in November. The butterfly remained motionless, tucked deeply amid the branches of an impromptu brushpile a homeowner threw together after a giant oak toppled in a late August storm. Larger wood was saved for firewood in the coming winter months, but what to do with all those smaller limbs? They were unceremoniously piled in a corner of the backlot at the edge of the woods. Out of the way and out-of-mind, they formed a large pile over sixfeet high and eight to ten feet wide.

About the same time the old oak fell, a female Question Mark flitted lazily nearby. She flapped low over roadside vegetation, seemingly in a random fashion, circling a plant, settling down for a second, then taking flight. The butterfly had been at this all afternoon, approaching many different plants very closely. Tirelessly, she wove in and out of the thick growth, searching for the "right one".

Finally she alighted on the tender new leaves of an elm. The female Question Mark curled her abdomen underneath a young leaf and quickly deposited one tiny egg, then she flew to another nearby elm shoot. When she left, she had laid three eggs in this particular elm clump.

Two weeks later, tiny caterpillars emerged from the eggs and immediately ate their eggshells. After that they began to munch on the elm leaves. As they grew, they shed, or molted, their old exoskeleton several times. This allowed them to continue to grow larger. After a couple of weeks, they were handsome caterpillars indeed, with many yellowish spines adorning their bodies. These probably gave them some protection from predators.

Their last molt was the most surprising. They quit eating and found hiding places nearby. Fastening themselves to a twig, they hung upside-down for a day and then their exoskeleton split, unveiling a leaf-brown chrysalis underneath.

In late September, the chrysalids split to reveal new butterflies. Their wings were a study in oranges, browns and blacks, with a lilac edging on the upper wings and a question mark in silver on the mottled brown underside of each hindwing.

This generation of adults survives the winter, tucked into hiding places. Next spring they will lay eggs, repeating the process all over again.

BUTTERFLIES WE'VE SEEN

Oct. 2: Seen at Lisa Lemza's place north of Soddy Daisy during her "Bring Your Own Shovel" open house: Long-tailed Skipper, Fiery Skipper, Sachem, Cloudless Sulphur, Great-spangled Fritillary, Monarch, Pearl Crescent, Painted Lady. Her fall garden was magnificent! Thanks for the invite Lisa.

Oct. 3: Hunt for Leonard's Skipper in Polk 'County. See story and butterfly list on pages 3-4.

Oct. 5: Libby Wolfe reported seeing a Painted Lady in her yard in Ooltewah.

Oct. 10: Bill Haley was on his hawk lookout at Soddy Mtn. from 10:00-4:45. He counted the following butterflies: 3 Orange Sulphur, 18 Cloudless Sulphur, 3 Sleepy Orange, 1 E. Tailed Blue, 6 Gulf Fritillary, 1 Variegated Fritillary, 12 Common Buckeye, 2 Monarch, 1 Sachem. Raptor migrants: 10 Sharp-shinned Hawks, 3 Cooper's Hawks, 2 Red-tailed Hawks and 1 falcon species. 71 migrant Blue Jays were also noted.

Oct. 18: David and Scott Spicer spent an hour or so at Red Clay State Park and saw a few butterflies. Among their finds were Gulf Fritillary, Painted Lady, Dun Skipper and Fiery Skipper. See David's Painted Lady photo below.



Oct. 19: While walking around his neighborhood in North Chattanooga, Bill Haley saw 3 Common Checkered Skippers (one in his yard, the first he's seen there all year), 5 Gulf Fritillary, 1 Monarch, 1 Pipevine Swallowtail and 2 Cloudless Sulphurs.



FUTURE BIO BLITZ NEWS: It has been decided not to have a Bio Blitz at Reflection Riding next April as originally planned. A decision was also made not to alternate between spring and fall dates, as the spring date falls much too closely after the fall date and it was feared this would make it difficult for taxon leaders. Future plans call for one to be done each spring. The next Bio Blitz will probably be held in April 2010.

LEONARD'S SKIPPER QUEST

Friday, October 3 dawned cool, clear and sunny. Despite the lateness of the season and the chill of the early morning air, I was optimistic it would be a good butterfly day and we would find the object of our search.

I had been invited by Jeff Basham and Stephen Johnson to accompany them to Polk County and visit the area where Jeff discovered Leonard's Skippers. Other uncommon to rare skippers have also been documented in this area, so I was really excited to see the habitat.



The object of our hunt, Leonard's Skipper, *Hesperia leonardus*. Truly a beautiful skipper!

- Photo by Stephen Johnson

The area where the Leonard's have been found is a hilltop on a power line cut not far from the Hiwassee River. Jeff pointed to a power tower a few hundred yards away and said that was where we were heading. The first thing you note is that there is no path up the hillside. This area is scattered brush, interspersed with grasses and wildflowers, and the going isn't hard at the base of the hill. We began to see butterflies; Clouded Skippers, Common Checkered Skippers, Pearl Crescents, Common Buckeyes and Great-spangled Fritillaries. No Leonard's yet....we still had a ways to go.

The power cut became more steep as we ascended, until about 2/3 of the way up we were on a narrow dirt path near the edge of the woods. Jeff and Steven had carved this path, cutting some brush with a chainsaw, after experiencing great difficulty reaching the top of the cut on previous trips. Here the slope immediately drops away at a 70 degree angle to your right. You don't want to slip here, or it might take awhile to stop! Now, I don't want to mislead you into thinking we were mountain climbing, far from it, but my thought is that you'd really have

to WANT to get up there. It is not a place a casual hiker, or butterflyer, might visit. In fact, I'd venture that very few people have been there. I had to admire Jeff's determination to find the Leonard's Skipper and what he had gone through to search for one.

Near the top of the hill the slope was only 25-30 degrees, so it wasn't difficult getting around. The predominant brush was 2-3 foot sumacs, all in brilliant red fall color. Blazing star, *Liatris* sp., bloomed in scattered clumps. This is the favored nectar plant for Leonard's at this site and Jeff had been afraid it would already be past its peak. We were relieved to see the 1-2 foot spikes of magenta flowers were still in full bloom. An attractive species of 3-4 foot tall goldenrod with a long spiky bloom and small purple asters mixed with numerous grasses rounded out the picture. An interesting plant community!

Butterfly activity was constant, as the temperature had climbed into the mid-70's. Of all flowers, the blazing stars were the most popular. For 90 minutes we walked around an area of roughly 25 yards square searching for the elusive Leonard's. Stephen used the technique of sitting quietly and letting the butterflies come to him. He spotted practically all species we saw using this passive approach.

In his book Butterflies of the East Coast, An Observers Guide, Rick Chech states: "*Leonard's is notoriously difficult to approach. It nectars actively, often at tall, pink or purple flowers.*" He goes on to state that in New Hampshire he had monitored a patch of flowers "*that was visited daily by Leonard's, always between 10 and 11am.*"

Having passed the time when they were supposed to be active, according to the book, and after almost two hours without results, Jeff said he was going to make one last search of the area.

After just a couple of minutes, he shouted "*Leonard's Skipper!*". Stephen and I rushed to the spot Jeff pointed at and there sat a beautiful Leonard's Skipper calmly nectaring on a blazing star, not 15 feet from where Stephen had sat earlier. Every bit as pretty as the photo accompanying this story, it flitted from one flower spike to another. It was most accommodating, giving us great looks, both above and below. We were all smiles as we descended the hill.

Butterfly list: Orange Sulphur (white and yellow forms), Cloudless Sulphur, Red-banded Hairstreak, E. Tailed Blue, Gulf Fritillary, Variegated Fritillary, Great-spangled Fritillary, Pearl Crescent, Painted Lady, Common Buckeye, Carolina Satyr, Monarch, Long-tailed Skipper, Zarucco Duskywing, Common Checkered Skipper, Clouded Skipper, Tawny-edged Skipper, Crossline Skipper, S. Broken-Dash, Sachus, and Leonard's Skipper.

- Bill Haley

More Photos from the Leonard's Skipper Hunt in Polk County, TN. All photos by Stephen Johnson.



Who says you can't admire fall colors while butterfly watching? Bill Haley and Jeff Basham pose amid the sumacs at the "Leonard's hilltop".



Butterfly predator on the powerline cut, a Twelve-spotted Skimmer dragonfly.



We weren't the only ones looking for Leonard's Skippers! This Chinese Mantis was spotted only 30-40 feet from where the Leonard's was found.



Predator eating a predator! Here are two more butterfly predators. A robberfly, normally an accomplished skipper catcher and eater, made the mistake of flying into the web of a female Black Widow. The very venomous widow won and busily wrapped up its lunch. (Photo taken here on a previous occasion.)



Hour glass: Another shot of the Black Widow, showing the very distinct red hour glass on the underside of the abdomen.



Bill makes a friend! A Great-spangled Fritillary decided to visit with Bill for awhile, perching on his arm for a couple of minutes.

Fiery Skipper

Hylephyla phyleus

Since some nice shots of Fiery Skippers have turned up in recent weeks, it seems a good time to feature this common skipper, which is a regular visitor in my yard. (This could have something to do with an abundance of their larval hostplants in the lawn!) - Your Editor

The Fiery Skipper, *Hylephyla phyleus*, is the only northern representative of this South American family. Interestingly, the genus name translates to "forest loving", despite the fact you won't find Fierys there! They can be found in a wide range of open, sunny habitats such as lawns, roadsides, fields, scrub, sandhills, savannahs and other disturbed places.

These brightly colored skippers are active throughout the day. Males perch near the ground and actively chase any intruders that happen by. It might be supposed they are after Fiery females, but this list also includes hummingbirds, other butterfly species and occasionally even humans. Both sexes fly very rapidly and are regular visitors to flowers in search of nectar.

As you can see from the excellent photos by Jack Gentle in the opposite column, the two sexes are different colors when seen with wings closed. The males are a very bright yellow-orange, easily seen from a distance. They are about the brightest skipper in our area. The female has a more dull yellowish-brown base color. There is some similarity in pattern, as both have small dark spots on the hindwing. The female's spots tend to be not as distinctly defined, a little larger and more smudgy in appearance.

Unfortunately I do not have great photos of the upper wings of males and females, but they are very different in pattern, (sexually dimorphic). The males show lots of orange and the females are much more brown with orange spotting on both forewing and hindwing.

Fiery Skippers are medium-sized for skippers, with an average wingspan of only 1.2 inches. They are very successful because they are generalists that thrive in disturbed habitats, such as lawns.

We won't have to worry about this species going extinct due to destruction of their hostplants or habitat. Their caterpillars dine very well on Bermuda Grass (*Cynodon dactylon*), Crabgrass (*Digitaria* sp.), St. Augustine Grass (*Stenotaphrum secundatum*), etc. Their larvae construct leaf nests that lie horizontally with the sod, which means they can easily survive lawn mowings.

Extremely common in the Southeast U.S., they are regular emigrants further north during the summer. In fact, their year-round range seems to be expanding gradually northward. Global warming at work? They may have as many as five broods each year in our area.



Fiery Skipper, male



Fiery Skipper, female

- both photos by Jack Gentle

PROPOSED DATES FOR BUTTERFLY COUNTS IN 2009

Believe it or not, dates are set for butterfly counts in 2009! Be aware there are other butterfly counts around the state which we hope to publicize at a later date. These dates include a new spring seasonal count. Mark those 2009 calendars now!

Sat., April 4: TN River Gorge, TN (seasonal)

Sat., June 13: Tennessee River Gorge, TN

Sat., June 20: Soddy-Daisy, TN

Sat., June 27: Lookout Mountain, GA

Sat., July 11: Catoosa / Whitfield, GA

(Tanya Jordan may compile this one)

Sat., July 25: Stevenson, AL

Sat, Aug. 29: Tennessee River Gorge, TN (seasonal)

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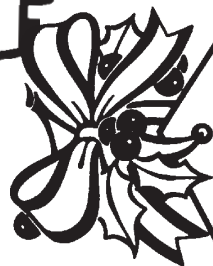
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BUTTERFLY INTERESTS

(Circle all that apply):

- Listing
- Butterfly Counts
- Observation
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Make check to **NABA**. Mail completed form & check to:
Jennifer Taylor, Tennessee Aquarium, P.O. Box 11048, Chattanooga, TN 37401-2048.

A membership in the Tennessee Valley Chapter of the North American Butterfly Association will make a great holiday gift!