



Photo by Tanya Jordan

# On The Wing

Newsletter of the Tennessee Valley Chapter,  
North American Butterfly Association

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**NO CHAPTER MEETING  
IN JANUARY.  
HAPPY  
NEW YEAR!**

**Meetings will resume  
on Tues., Feb. 24th.**



### WILL YOU BE THE FIRST?

On the date this is being written, (Jan. 2), not a single butterfly was seen in December by your editor and I have received no reports of sightings.

Now that January is here, we're starting the year with a clean slate. I wonder who will be the first one to report a butterfly sighting in 2009? If you should see a butterfly in January, please e-mail me at [wgh@tnaqa.org](mailto:wgh@tnaqa.org) or call me at 785-4056 so I can report it in this newsletter. Will there be a prize for the first '09 report? Who knows, there might be!

If you are not already aware of it, there is a Tennessee butterfly listserve available. It was started a couple of years ago by Steve Stedman. This year it is being overseen by Tanya Jordan. Thanks for taking this demanding job over Tanya!

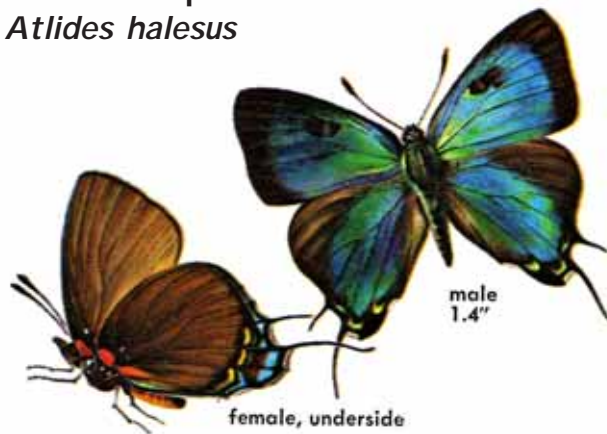
To subscribe to the listserve, go to the following web address: <http://www.freelists.org/list/tn-butterflies> and you can easily sign up. People on this list would love to hear about your sightings.



### CAN YOU IDENTIFY THE BUTTERFLY PICTURED AT THE TOP OF THIS PAGE?

It is a pleasant distraction on a cold winter day to dream about beautiful butterflies we'll see with the return of warm weather. This one will be found in sunny, open fields with abundant flowers. You may see it being pursued by a yellow or orangish-yellow butterfly of about the same size. What butterfly species is it?

## Great Purple Hairstreak *Atlides halesus*



The Great Purple Hairstreak, *Atlides halesus*, is one of the most sought-after hairstreaks in this area. While not exactly rare, it is certainly uncommon. Sometimes you can go a whole season without spotting one.

There is a tie-in between this species and the Christmas season, and it has to do with the larval hostplant, mistletoe. The parasitic plant that you see growing in bright green clumps on various trees (and sometimes hanging over doorways during the holidays), is the sole food source for Great Purple Hairstreak caterpillars.

Some scientists speculate they might gain protection from predators by saving up toxins from the mistletoe that would make them very distasteful to predators. Young caterpillars eat male flowers, new leaves and the outer layer of older leaves. Mature larvae eat mature leaves. They hide their chrysalis under loose bark near the base of the tree.

They are our second largest hairstreak. Interestingly, they aren't really purple at all. Upper wings, when open, are a beautiful metallic blue-green and black. They are a dark black on the underside, which fades to brownish-purple (maybe this is where the "purple" in the name comes from?). The abdomen is bright orange. They have a blue and gold iridescence near the two hindwing tails and three red spots at the base of the wings. The closed wings only give you a faint hint of the gorgeous upperside color.

## Around The Puddle

by Bill Haley

### The To-Do List

I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday season and is looking forward to a great new year. Now that we are past the winter solstice and the days are beginning to get longer, I'm already thinking about the coming spring and summer.

The biggest thing on my home to-do list for the upcoming butterfly season is a continuing revamp of my flower garden. Although I started reworking some parts last fall, there is much more work to be done. I've still got a few flowers in pots waiting to be put in the ground, including one butterfly bush that I have high hopes for. Hopefully frigid winter weather won't do it in before I get it planted!

2009 will be our chapter's second field season. April 2008 saw the formation of the chapter. Then came publication of a monthly newsletter, numerous field trips, butterfly counts, election of our first officers, adoption of by-laws and monthly meetings and programs. As one of the newest chapters of the North American Butterfly Association, I am proud that we've gotten off to a very strong start. We now have around 30 NABA memberships.

Here are a few things on the 2009 to-do list:

1.) **A website.** I hope someone with greater computer skills than I will step up to tackle this first item. Our chapter needs its own website. The membership coordinator at NABA, Lisa Lewis, recently asked if we have a website. She said NABA would be happy to put a link on their website to our chapter website. This would help attract more members to our chapter. Any takers on this project?

2.) **A new table top display board** to feature graphics that would advertise our chapter and local butterflies is needed. March 14th is the 40th anniversary of "The Very Hungry Caterpillar", a fun children's book by Eric Carl. The publishing company has contacted the Aquarium about a day-long butterfly member event to highlight this milestone, and we certainly need to be represented there. Local plant sales, the county fair, and garden shows might be other worthwhile venues.

3.) **New counts and surveys.** We will add a spring butterfly count on April 4th. Work on butterfly surveys on the Cumberland Trail and Tennessee State Parks ATBI's is also planned.

4.) **New program presenters.** We will need good monthly program topics for our meetings.

5.) **Have fun watching butterflies this year!**



Photo by David Spicer

Here is a photo of a Northern White Skipper, submitted to the TN butterfly listserve by David Spicer. You won't find one of these skippers locally. He snapped this photo in Los Angeles, California while on a trip out there last October.



Photo by Mike O'Brien

Mike O'Brien, of Valley Head, Alabama, snapped this photo of a beautiful lime-green caterpillar that is a definite "DO NOT TOUCH" type critter. Many of those branching spines along its back can deliver a painful venomous sting. You may have had close encounters of the unpleasant kind with these guys in the past. I'm not sure how many different host plants this caterpillar uses, but I've encountered several while trimming privet hedge. Even a casual touch delivers several stings at once!

The adult is the Io Moth, a beautiful medium-sized yellow to yellowish-brown moth. When at rest, the forewings cover a surprise on the hindwings...huge eyespots that look just like a screech owl's eyes. If it is disturbed by a predator, it spreads its wings, displaying these big "eyes". By the time the predator gets over the initial scare, the moth has time to take flight and escape.