



## Around The Puddle

by Bill Haley

### Fickle February

Have you ever noticed that the late winter weather can be very fickle in Chattanooga and the surrounding areas? Perhaps you've heard the old saying, "If you don't like the weather, just wait a few minutes and it will change." This is certainly the case in February. We get both the worst winter weather and the best winter weather most years in February.

Writing this column in mid-January, I certainly don't have a crystal ball to predict this year's February weather. Nor did I carefully check the brown and black bands on last fall's woollyworm caterpillars to help me predict how our winter will go.

I feel safe in betting it'll range from frigid winds and sub-freezing temperatures with snow and ice to 70+ degree days when it feels like spring has arrived. The weird thing about these temperature fluctuations is that we can go from freezing-your-butt-off miserable wintertime weather to sunny, balmy days with frogs calling, butterflies flying, bees buzzing and crocus and dafodils blooming, all in the same week.

You'll remember my plea in the January issue for any butterfly sightings. Well, it's I nauguration Day and I haven't heard from anyone yet. Not likely today will produce that first butterfly of 2009 since it isn't going to break 30 degrees and a frigid west wind is blowing.

I haven't given up yet, even though this month has been colder and wetter than usual. We still have 11 days!

James Adams, NABA member and moth expert extraordinaire, made the point that when I asked for first sightings I should have qualified hibernators versus emergers. He said "*Hibernators really shouldn't count (but that's just my opinion).*" Good point James, but I like to see ANY butterfly flitting around in the middle of winter, even if it is one that emerged last fall and then hibernated.

But February is another story. I predict there WILL be butterflies in February. We'll see butterflies awake from hibernation and we'll see brand new butterflies emerge from winter-dormant chrysalids. YIPEEEE! I can hardly wait.

So...what do you think will be the first emerger? James is betting Spring Azure and I'm going for Falcate Orangetip. What do you think? Place your bets!

## News Flash!

### First Butterfly Sighting of 2009

Sunday, February 1, 2009: 2:00pm Eastern, Blue Blazes Trail parking area, Moccasin Bend, Hamilton County, TN. Temperature: 61 degrees F, 100% sunshine. It was a very warm afternoon the day before Groundhog Day, so Bill Haley ventured out seeking the first butterfly of 2009. Less than one minute after exiting his car, he spotted an **American Snout**, *Libytheana carinenta*, near the gravel road. This area is hemmed in by pine woods on both sides which helped block off a brisk wind that was blowing in more exposed areas. The butterflies, which overwinter as adults, were obviously taking advantage of the bright sunshine and warm temperatures. He eventually saw 7 butterflies, of which he got looks at 5, all American Snouts. Several were basking in the sun on low plant stems.

Of interest, the next day was rainy and cool with some snow showers on Signal Mountain and in Bradley County. Colder weather in the low 40's and biting cold winds on Tuesday. Wednesday morning saw wind chills of 7 degrees F. (See column opposite, which was written almost two weeks prior to this date).

### First (Reared) Butterfly Emergence, 2009

Thursday, January 22, 2009: Mark Lawrence, with Tennessee River Gardens, sent an e-mail: "*I have just had a butterfly (a Red-spotted Purple) emerge in my indoor emergence box! The chrysalis has remained dormant since the third week of last April. What a surprise!! It is now dining on sugar water and flying around the office.*"

### WAYSIDE GARDENS FLOWER CATALOG LISTS BUTTERFLY SUPPORT PLANTS

In a note to local Master Gardeners, Lisa Lemza said that Wayside Garden's new website catalog has a link for butterfly support plants.

<http://images.waysidegardens.com/wayside/wem001029/Butterflywem001029rg.html>

She added, "*REMEMBER: Although it is important to plant nectar plants to attract mature butterflies, it's just as crucial to plant food to support caterpillars in their larval stage. That's why you always plant one parsley for you, and one for the swallowtail caterpillars, one for you, one for the caterpillars, one for you.....*"

*Butterfly species are EXTREMELY specific for larval food - many caterpillars will only eat one plant. Once mature, however, most of these same butterflies will dine from many nectar sources: it's the caterpillars that are picky. Examples: Dutchman's pipe for the spectacular Pipevine Swallowtails, butterfly weed (Aesclepias tuberosa) or any milkweed for Monarch caterpillars.*"

Her advice for our native passionvine: "*Tuck it away, however, for no matter how spectacular its flowers, its devoured by late summer by feeding caterpillars (that's a good thing).*"

(- cont. on next page, FLOWERS)



- Photos by Tommie Rogers

**TWO BEAUTIES FROM SOUTH TEXAS:** Tommie Rogers sent these photos taken in late January at Llano River State Park in South Texas. The Band-celled Sister, *Adelpha fessonia* (top) and Mexican Bluewing, also called the Blue Wave, *Myscenia cyaniris* (bottom), are both Mexican and Central American species that appear in this country in South Texas near the Rio Grande River. Illegal immigrants? Who cares! Both species can also be viewed in the Tennessee Aquarium's Butterfly Garden exhibit.

**CAN YOU IDENTIFY** the butterfly at the top of page one? It overwinters in the chrysalis stage, and emerges very early each spring. Most years around Chattanooga adults may be seen by early March, and if the late winter weather is warm enough, some emerge in late February. It has only one brood annually. The flight period lasts just a little longer than one month, so you must get out early in the year to see it. The one pictured is a male. When patrolling for females, he seems to be in perpetual motion. They are easy to identify, but it is difficult to see one at rest. (Hint: Females don't have the orange tip on their wings).

**FLOWERS:** cont. from pg. 2:

Lisa relayed a few personal experiences with some of the selections in Wayside Gardens' catalog, which may prove valuable to any of you considering purchases.

"The listed *passiflora 'Sherry'* (passion vine) is a tropical, and you'd do better (for butterflies) to plant our own native passionvine." She continues, "Our native is also a free seeder, which can make it a pest. But the fruits are edible and reportedly make good jellies.

The *alcea mix* listed (hollyhocks) produces wonderful plants, and I always have them but they too get devoured and ratty looking by summer's end - they take a terrible beating from Japanese beetles, and unlike many other plants so damaged, never seem to recover later in the summer. Mine also get mildew, which doesn't bother me much but might bother you.

The *monarda 'Petite Wonder'* is a typical monarda (bee balm) except for its short size: It really is only about 6 inches high. The problem I've found with it is that, although I can and do ignore mildew on tall monardas, it really, really bothered me on this miniature. It was just more 'in your face'.

The miniature *buddleia 'Blue Chip'* truly is tiny, and in the 15 months I've had my two they remain, as advertised, under two feet. One's in a pot."



- Photo by Mike O'Brien

**FIRST BLOOMS:** Thanks to Mike O'Brien, of Fort Payne, Alabama, for this lovely photo of the first crocus blooms in his yard, taken January 27. Can spring be far behind? Who cares what that Pennsylvania groundhog says, he's never even been to Tennessee, Georgia or Alabama!

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