



Photo by Jack Gentle

On The Wing

Newsletter of the Tennessee Valley Chapter,
North American Butterfly Association

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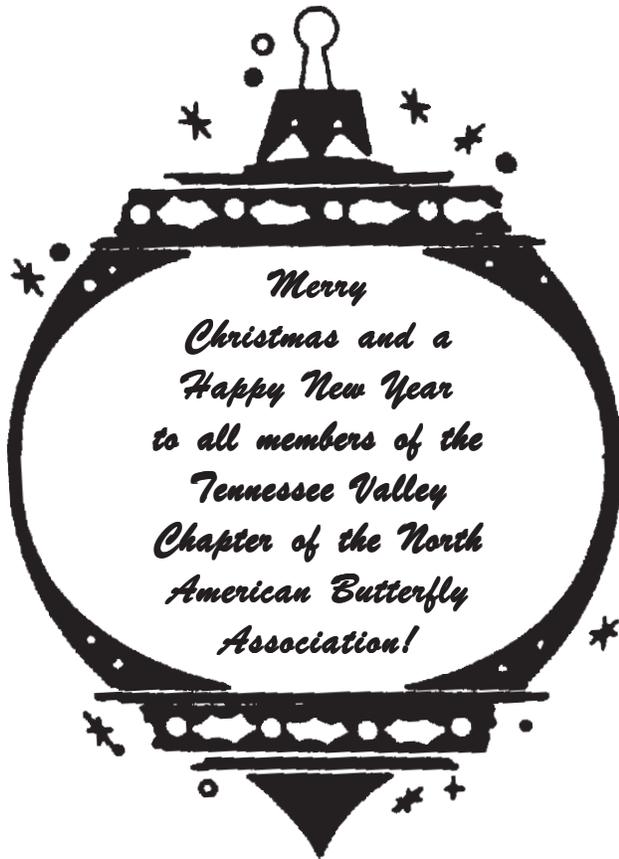
Wintering Butterflies

Now that the leaves have come off the deciduous trees and cold winter days are the norm, butterfly sightings will become more and more unusual. However, it is not impossible to see a butterfly, even in December. Our weather in this part of the southeast is famous for being extremely changeable, with cold weather interspersed with unseasonably warm spells.

Several butterfly species overwinter as adults. Some will come out of diapause during warm snaps, so it is likely that someone will see a wintertime butterfly or two. These sightings are precious, because most folks just don't expect to see a butterfly during the winter months.

Please report those sightings to Bill Haley at wgh@tnaqua.org, or you can send it in writing to: Bill Haley, Tennessee Aquarium, P.O. Box 11048, Chattanooga, TN 37401-2048.

Last winter, I didn't receive any winter reports, nor did I spot any wintertime butterflies. Perhaps this December-January season will be better.



*Merry
Christmas and a
Happy New Year
to all members of the
Tennessee Valley
Chapter of the North
American Butterfly
Association!*

*No meeting in December.
Have a wonderful
holiday season!*



Photo by
Jeff Basham

The Mourning Cloak overwinters as an adult and is sometimes seen on warm winter days.

Around The Puddle

by Bill Haley

A Ray of Sunshine

Just like the winged creatures we seek in warmer months, many butterfly watchers become somewhat inactive in the winter months...at least in their explorations of the natural world. After all, isn't December the beginning of the butterfly doldrums? Figuring you won't see another butterfly for the next 2-3 months, why even get out and look, since your quest is bound to be fruitless?

Recently on the Tennessee butterflies listserv, a friend posted similar sentiments after a night in the 20's, saying "stick a fork in it" and going on to proclaim "the butterfly season is officially over".

When I hear such things, I reflect on a time in my late teenage years and a magical Christmas day when the sun shone and temperatures reached into the 70's. To tell the truth, I really don't remember any gift I got for Christmas that year, but I do remember that sun-spangled afternoon. After the early morning opening of presents and the traditional Christmas morning breakfast at my grandparent's house, I decided to drive up to a special place in Sale Creek where I loved to hunt arrowheads on a long sandbar sticking into the river. I'm pretty sure I found a few, but I can't remember which ones came home with me that day.

I do distinctly remember one thing that happened that afternoon. I recall sitting atop nearby limestone bluffs, short-sleeved, muddy and happy, soaking in the wonderful sunshine. It was a truly peaceful, serene time.

Out of the corner of my eye, I caught a fluttering movement. A Mourning Cloak butterfly flew out of the nearby woods and landed about 10 feet away, wings spread, obviously enjoying the sunshine. It was somewhat ragged with frayed golden wing edges and little was left of the deep purplish velvet it had sported when fresh, but it was beautiful just the same. It was a very special Christmas gift that year.

I find it amazing how one butterfly, seen on a Christmas afternoon almost 40 years ago, sticks in my memory.

It is that instance and several other sunny winter day butterflies over the years that cause me to rankle a bit when someone states the butterfly season is "officially over". Really? Oh ye of little faith!

I guess someone should tell some of the butterflies. They don't think so.

December Butterfly: Mike O'Brien reported he saw a "small and old" Great Spangled Fritillary at his place in Valley Head, Alabama on December 1st. It was nectaring on the withering wild fall asters. Has anyone else seen any December butterflies? (The photo below of a GSF was taken by Carol Wolf in July.)



Photo by Carol Wolf

Southeast Arizona Butterflies:

Susan Schott and Libby Wolfe traveled to Southeastern Arizona in mid-November on a birding trip. Susan reports they saw 9 species of butterflies, "some of them familiar to us in Tennessee and some not." The familiar ones were Sleepy Orange, Painted Lady and Red Admiral. The others were Mexican Yellow, Fatal Metalmark, Ceraunus Blue, Texan Crescent, West Coast Lady and California Sister. The West Coast Lady has a forewing tip that is extended and squared off, and the last large pale bar near the wingtip is orange instead of white like the Painted Lady.



Photo by Susan Schott



Left: West Coast Lady

Photo taken by Susan Schott in Madiera Canyon, AZ



CALIFORNIA SISTER

Photo by Susan Schott



Texan Crescent

Photo by Susan Schott

Two more photos taken in Southeast Arizona

SPICER FAMILY VACATION:

A few shots from the Spicer's western vacation in June and July 2009.

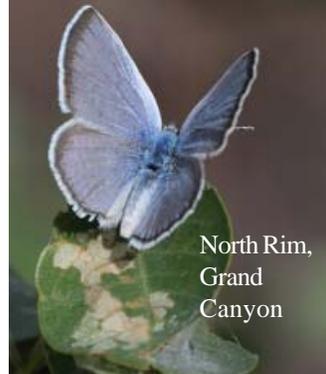
All photos by David Spicer

Behr's Hairstreak

Zion Canyon N.P.



Boisduval's Blue



North Rim, Grand Canyon

Greenish Blue



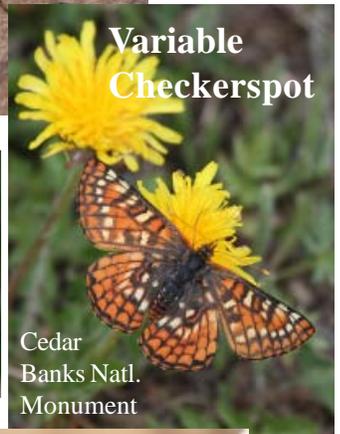
Cedar Breaks Natl. Monument

Pahaska Skipper

Mesa Verde, CO



Variable Checkerspot



Cedar Banks Natl. Monument

Pale Crescent



Bryce Canyon N.P.

Weidemeyer's Admiral

North Rim, Grand Canyon



Join NABA, the North American Butterfly Association

The North American Butterfly Association was started in 1994 to popularize the study of butterflies through observation and identification through use of field marks rather than collecting.

The Tennessee Valley NABA chapter was formed in 2008. The chapter's territory is centered around southeastern Tennessee, but also encompasses parts of northwestern Georgia and northeastern Alabama. Anyone who joins the national organization within a zip code area beginning with 374, 373 (with the exception of 37355 which is allocated to the Middle Tennessee NABA chapter), 307, 357 or 359 will automatically become a member of the chapter.

It is also possible for persons living outside this zip code area to become a member of the Tennessee Valley chapter. When you join or renew your NABA membership, be sure to specify that you'd like to be affiliated with the Tennessee Valley chapter. Joining online is easy. Go to their website at <http://www.naba.org> and click on Membership. Individual membership is \$30. Family membership is \$40 and an institution/library can join for \$50. How about NABA membership for a Christmas gift?



Photo by Mike O'Brien

U.F.O.? Mike O'Brien saw a winged visitor flying around his home mid-day on November 15th. He was unable to identify it, but after several tries, he was able to get this photograph, which is an impressive accomplishment.

As soon as I saw the photo, I knew exactly what it was. It is one of my very favorite Lepidopterans! They usually are seen flying in the late fall. I have never seen one before October. I've also never seen one that wasn't in flight.

I've never been able to catch one, although I've tried a number of times over the years. Because of its elusive nature and the time of year that it flies, it has taken on a special significance with me.

Pictured below is a photo of the caterpillar of this species. Looks pretty prickly! The caterpillars usually dine on oak. Eggs are laid in clusters on a branch and the larvae feed together. Oh, by the way, they have stinging spines. They do not spin cocoons, but burrow into the ground to pupate. (*More clues to help decide between butterfly and moth.*)



Can you identify this species?

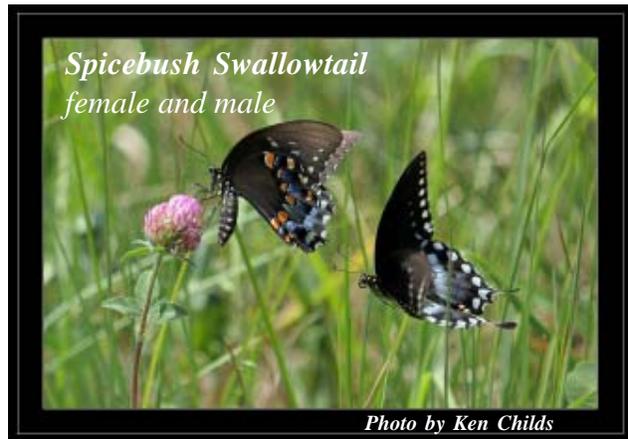
Hint: The adult, larvae and eggs are all shown in the Golden Guide, *Butterflies and Moths*.

My friend, Doug Geren, recently sent a clipping from the Cleveland Daily Banner with a good AP wirephoto of a Spicebush Swallowtail caterpillar.

The caption reads:

"RARE BUTTERFLY - This September 2009 photo released by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries shows a spicebush swallowtail caterpillar on a leaf in a hardwood swamp in Wells, Maine. Scientists say the finding confirms that particular species of butterfly breeds in Maine, 75 years after the last reported sighting."

Wow! It had been 75 years since Spicebush Swallowtail had been reported in Maine! Just goes to show that rarity can mean different things. Some species are truly rare across the board due to limited numbers, climate, scattered populations and declining or disappearing habitat. That whole species might be in danger of extinction. However, the Spicebush Swallowtail is a relatively common species across most of its range, but considered very rare in Maine. It is rare there because it is at the very northern edge of its range.



Spicebush Swallowtail female and male

Photo by Ken Childs



Baltimore Checkerspot

Photo by Jeff Basham

A good example locally is the Baltimore Checkerspot, which is somewhat common in the Northeast, but currently known from one tiny population in Hamilton County. We are right on the southern edge of this species' range.