



Photo by Jeff Basham

# On The Wing

Newsletter of the Tennessee Valley Chapter,  
North American Butterfly Association

May 2011

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Editor: Bill Haley, wgh@tnaqua.org

## May Meeting

Tuesday, May 24 - 7:00pm

Rita Venable  
Butterflies of Tennessee



Zebra Swallowtail  
Tennessee's official state butterfly

Photo by  
Jeff Basham

Rita Venable, founder of the Middle Tennessee NABA chapter and avid butterfly photographer will present our May program. She will talk of her ongoing project to produce a book about the butterflies of Tennessee. The meeting will be at Outdoor Chattanooga, near Coolidge Park in North Chattanooga.

For a number of years Rita has traveled around the state getting photos of the different life stages, egg, leava, pupae and adult, of our native Tennessee butterflies. She has begun work on her book and may need our help to provide data on East Tennessee butterflies. The public is invited and we expect a good turnout, so plan to join us.

**WHERE DO WE MEET?** We will meet at Outdoor Chattanooga, near Coolidge Park on River Street. This is on the north side of the Tennessee River. Turn off Frazier Avenue towards the Chattanooga Theatre Center, then turn right on River Street. Outdoor Chattanooga is on the left just before you go under the Walnut Street Bridge.

You can park for free on the street, or park in one of the pay lots. Please be sure to pay, (only \$1-2), or you run the risk of getting an \$11 parking ticket!

*Mark Your Calendar and Join in the Fun.  
Joint Field Trip with the Middle  
Tennessee NABA Chapter!*

**Saturday, May 14  
Baltimore Checkerspots**

Bridgestone/Firestone Centennial  
Wilderness, White County (Sparta, TN)  
Leader: Bart Jones, (901) 485-2745 (cell), e-mail  
bjones7777@ hotmail.com

**We'll meet to carpool to Sparta, TN:**  
9:30am Eastern at the Subway in Soddy-Daisy.  
**Directions to S-D Subway:** From Chattanooga take  
Hwy. 27N to Soddy-Daisy; exit at Sequoyah Rd.  
and turn right. When road T's into Old Dayton  
Pike, you'll see the Subway ahead of you to the  
left. For more info, or directions to McDonald's in  
Sparta, call Bill Haley (423) 785-4056 (W), (423)  
756-4106 (H), or (423) 326-9248 (cell), or e-  
mail WGH@tnaqua.org.

The Middle Tennessee and Tennessee Valley NABA chapters will team up to search for Baltimore Checkerspots. Hopefully, we will find a few of these black, orange and white beauties as they will just be at the beginning of their flight period. (See photo, top left of this page.) Bridgestone/Firestone is home to one of the state's largest colonies of this rare and localized butterfly. Please bring a lunch to eat in the field. After lunch we will explore the woodland trails for late spring wildflowers. As per NABA field trip etiquette, no netting or collecting is allowed. We will meet at the McDonald's in Sparta, TN at 10:00am Central time. See directions above for our meeting place to carpool up to Sparta.

We currently know of just one small population of Baltimores in Hamilton County, so it'll be interesting to see what their habitat looks like.

**Note:** If weather is rainy, we will probably **NOT** make the trip over to Sparta.

## Have you counted your blessings?

Wednesday, April 27 is a day that will go down in the history of Tennessee, Georgia and Alabama as one of the worst weather days ever in this region. A record number of tornadoes and very high winds caused huge damage and demolished homes and lives across the tri-state area. This is a storm that will take months or years for some folks to recover from.

As I walked around North Chattanooga a week later, the number of downed large hardwood trees, snapped power poles, crushed houses and general wind damage was amazing. And all less than two months after the major wind storm when a giant oak came down in my yard and crushed both our cars, as well as a passing car in front of our house. Luckily this time we escaped with only minor tree damage. Many, many other people in the Tennessee, Georgia and Alabama area were not nearly as lucky. My heart goes out to those who lost businesses, churches, homes, all their possessions, loved ones and pets in these storms.

At church last Sunday morning we sang "Count Your Blessings", and I couldn't help thinking how appropriate that song was in the wake of these devastating storms. The fact that we were sitting in church singing a hymn was reasonable enough for counting our many blessings.

Sunday afternoon I decided to visit the top of Raccoon Mountain. Reminders of the tornadoes, however, were scattered throughout the woods - a piece of metal siding wrapped partially around a tree, bits of torn particle board, bits of plywood, shingles and insulation scattered in the woods where normally you wouldn't expect such things. Just four days previous, those were pieces of someone's home.

How about the animals? Well, I'm happy to report that they seem to have made it through all right. I found 28 species of butterflies, including 8 Gemmed Satyrs (the most I've found there in one day), and my first black ratsnake of the year. The highlight for me was over 15 Fiery Searcher ground beetles, arguably the most beautiful ground beetle in this country. They are caterpillar eaters, and there was an abundance of inchworm caterpillars. Don't worry, those turn into moths! (Sorry about that last sentence James, moths are a blessing too!)

## A Message From Your President

Last month I put a plea in this newsletter for some programming ideas for meetings, field trip leaders or places where we might meet this summer. I also asked for help with the BioBlitz, to be held May 20-21 at Reflection Riding. **The silence from all our Tennessee Valley NABA members has been deafening!** I've heard not one word from anyone.

Although this is disheartening to me, I guess I shouldn't be surprised. Every group, club or church committee I've ever been a part of has demonstrated the "10-90 rule". You know how it goes - 10% of the people do 90% of the work. As for the other 90%, I really appreciate your support by joining NABA and your attendance at some meetings, but I'd love for you to perhaps get a bit more involved in your local NABA chapter.

At the May meeting we will elect officers for the upcoming year. If you can serve, now is the time to step up and let me know. I'd love to have someone to coordinate a few field trips too!

If you have ideas or can help with any of the things I mentioned in this message, please contact me at wgh@tnaqua.org or (423) 326-9248 (cell), (423) 785-4056 (W) or (423) 756-4106 (H).

Bill Haley  
President, Tennessee Valley NABA



Photo by Jeff Basham

Joining online is easy. Go to the NABA 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.

Anyone who joins NABA 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 Tennessee Valley chapter.

It is also possible for persons living outside this zip code area to become members 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.

## Yucca Giant Skipper Colony Discovered at Enterprise South Nature Park

On Tuesday, April 19 I got a call from David Spicer, who informed me that he'd discovered Yucca Giant Skippers at the new Enterprise South Nature Park near the Volkswagen plant. David's discovery is the first documentation of this infrequently-seen species for Hamilton County, TN. He asked if I'd like to come over and check them out. It happened that I had finished with my school programs earlier that day and it was one of those rare occasions when I could get away from work, so off I went. I met David and Libby Wolfe and we found at least 3, possibly 4, Yucca Giant Skippers that afternoon. Many other folks have been out to see them since then, and have seen them mating and laying eggs on nearby yucca plants. Here is a compilation of photos.



Yucca Giant Skipper egg

Photo by  
Tommie  
Rogers

Tommie Rogers visited the site on April 20 and found a Yucca Giant Skipper that she watched lay an egg near the tip of a yucca. Efforts will be made to get a photo of the caterpillars as well.

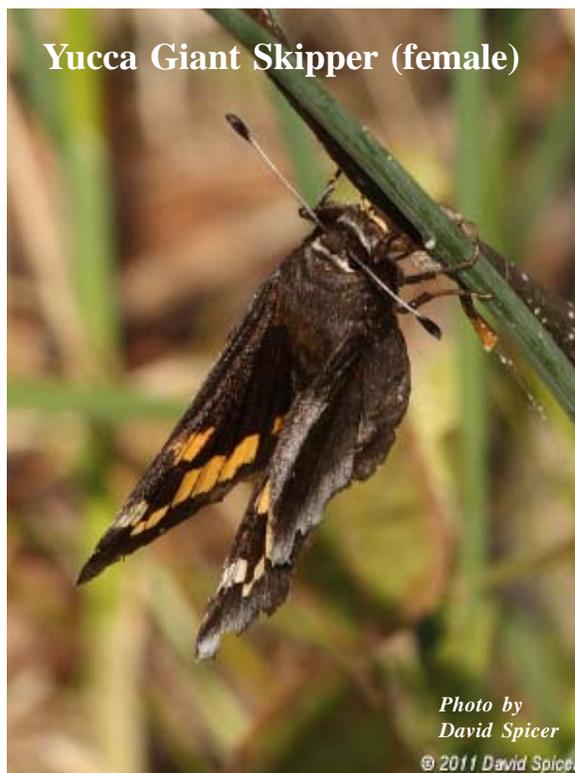


Yucca Giant Skipper (male)  
*Megathymus yuccae*

Photo by  
David Spicer

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Here is a Yucca Giant Skipper perched on a dead weed stalk 2-3 feet above the ground. This is typical of their vertical resting posture and choice of places to land. All the ones we saw were posed vertically on weed stems. Of interest, note that the butterfly has wrapped its legs entirely around the weed stem and locked its legs together. They maintain this pose for long periods of time, and can be approached fairly closely without flying. David also observed one that was sitting on the road before we got there.



Yucca Giant Skipper (female)

Photo by  
David Spicer

© 2011 David Spicer

This female Yucca Giant Skipper was perched lower to the ground on the sturdy stems of a green wild onion plant. One thing that strikes you about these large-bodied butterflies is that their body form somewhat resembles that of certain sphinx moths. Their flight is described in Butterflies of the East Coast as a "barging and erratic flight". They add, "These large, unlikely looking butterflies hurtle headlong through open woodlands at high speed, usually returning afterwards to their original perch."

## Some Outstanding April Butterfly Photos

