



On The Wing

Newsletter of the Tennessee Valley Chapter,
North American Butterfly Association

July/Aug. 2013

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2013 NABA August Butterfly Count Schedule

No NABA counts are scheduled for July, when Bill's schedule is full. The following counts, scheduled in August, are being publicized a bit early so you can mark your calendar. Butterfly diversity and numbers are usually at their peak during this time of the year. There is a fee of \$3 per person for each count you participate in to help NABA defray publishing expenses.

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Note: It is going to be hot, so please dress for the weather and plan to bring a cooler stocked with ample liquids to drink. (*Warning to the wise: One bottle of water will NOT be enough - bring at least 2-4!*) Be sure to pack some sandwiches/snacks to sustain you during the day too. A hat and sunscreen are also good things to have. If you have a pair of close-focus binoculars, they will be invaluable in helping see the field marks on tiny butterflies.

Fri., August 2:

Soddy-Daisy, TN fall seasonal count

Meet: 9:30am at parking lot behind Subway in Soddy-Daisy. Directions: From Chattanooga take Hwy. 27N and exit at Sequoyah Road. Turn right onto Sequoyah Road. Go through 2 traffic lights. You'll see the Subway sandwiches place on the left as you enter the parking lot after the 2nd light. Leader: Bill Haley, (see contact info).

Please note that this count will be conducted on a weekday (Friday). If you are free that day, come out and give us a hand. This count's 15 mile diameter circle spills over onto the Harrison side of the lake. We'll caravan from the meeting site to various locales within the count circle. Remember to bring close-focus binoculars if you have them. See note above for how to prepare.

Thursday, August 15:

Tennessee River Gorge, TN Seasonal Count

Meet: 9:30am, Signal Mtn. Road Bi-Lo parking lot
Leader: Bill Haley, (see contact info).

Note: This count will be conducted on a weekday, Thursday. Please consider helping out if you are available. The Tennessee River Gorge count was conducted over two months ago, on June 8, so we'll see if we can improve on the 37 species that were found then. We'll caravan to many different locations within the 15 mile diameter count circle and find as many species as possible. If we have enough people, we may split up groups for better coverage of the count circle. Stay with us for the whole day, or just a couple of hours, depending on your schedule. We need all the help we can get! Remember that you do not have to be an identification expert. Someone will be there to help puzzle out those grass skipper identifications.



This Mourning Cloak, *Nymphalis antiopa*, was found during the Tennessee River Gorge count in low vegetation near the river at the Pot Point Field Station. We speculate that it had probably just emerged from the chrysalis, as it was quite docile and let everyone approach very closely. Photo by Mike O'Brien..

Around the Puddle

by Bill Haley

Oh boy! Grass skippers!!!

It has been wonderful to have the opportunity to spend some time in the field with my butterfly friends during the counts. It is always a treat to observe the wonders of the natural world with others. After a spring that didn't allow any time with the butterflies, count season has been a breath of fresh air for me.

Not all is fun and games, however. Summer-time counting can be an itchy business. My old foes, ticks, chiggers and poison ivy have all put in an appearance and I've spent more than a little time scratching.

Additionally...there is another nemesis to be dealt with on a count: **grass skippers**. The mere thought of grass skipper identification is enough to send many butterfly watchers scampering away to look for a nice Pearl Crescent or other well-marked brushfoot instead.

I love grass skippers. I also hate grass skippers. The "little brown jobs" of the butterfly world can present a huge challenge for anyone attempting an identification.

Have you ever wondered why we butterfly counters need close-focus binoculars? Imagine this: To confirm a particular species you should look for a small white area before the antennal club. We are talking about a butterfly with a wingspan of about an inch. **REALLY**. Now you know.

Spot bands are always fun! How about a spot band on the hindwing that may be distinct, but on some individuals of the same species is not there at all? Is it blotchy and smudged-looking? Is it shaped like a backwards 3? Way too many of those tiny, confusing skippers have spot bands!!!

Occasionally you actually have some color other than brown to work with. That should make it easier, right? For instance, when the wings are closed, is the visible narrow edge of the forewing more or less orange, and how much does it contrast with the medium brown hindwing color? Is the overall color brown, brick red or gray?

These are all issues we attempt to resolve on a count when we find confusing grass skippers. And I always hope to find lots and lots of grass skippers. This is why I love grass skippers. The more you identify, the bigger your species total is at the end of the day. Don't let this scare you away from a count. You can always stand back and laugh as I struggle with identifications.

2014 North American Butterfly Association Biennial Members Meeting Will be Held in Chattanooga, Tennessee on June 12-15, 2014!

In a recent e-mail from Rita Venable, I learned that the NABA members meeting will be held in Chattanooga next year. Butterflies from all over the country will converge on our area and this will be a great opportunity to show off our butterflies to a national audience. Hosts for this event will be Rita Venable, from Franklin, TN, and Bart Jones from Memphis. We will need local folks to help with this event, so don't make other plans to be anywhere else during that time next summer! As we receive more information, it'll be passed along to the members of the Tennessee Valley NABA chapter.

TOTALS FROM THE 19TH ANNUAL TENNESSEE RIVER GORGE, TN COUNT

The Tennessee River Gorge count was conducted on Saturday, June 8, 2013. Participants included: Harold Birch, Bill Haley, Mike O'Brien, Tommie Rogers, Nancy Williams and Libby Wolfe. It was a mostly sunny day with temperatures from 68-82 F and light winds. Several normally common species were scarce or absent, possibly due to the cool, wet spring.

Butterflies found were: Pipevine Swallowtail 1, Giant Sw. 1, Eastern Tiger Sw. 8, Spicebush Sw. 10, Cabbage White 1, Orange Sulphur 2, Cloudless Su 2, Sleepy Orange 2, Banded Hairstreak 2, Gray Ha. 1, Red-banded Ha. 1, Eastern Tailed-Blue 67, Summer Azure 14, American Snout 2, Variegated Fritillary 2, Great Spangled Fr. 11, Pearl Crescent 1, Question Mark 2, Mourning Cloak 2, Red Admiral 3, Common Buckeye 1, Red-spotted Purple 1, Hackberry Emperor 22, Tawny Emperor 4, Carolina Satyr 2, Little Wood Satyr 14, Silver-spotted Skipper 11, Hoary Edge 8, Northern Cloudywing 1, Tawny-edged Sk. 3, Crossline Sk. 2, Southern Broken-Dash 2, Northern Broken-Dash 3, Little Glassywing 3, Zabulon Sk. 8, Dun Sk. 5, Eufala Sk. 1.

Total: 37 species, 252 individuals

Zabulon Skipper, *Poanes zabulon*, was one of 11 skipper species found on the Tennessee River Gorge count.



Photo by
Mike O'Brien

TOTALS FOR THE 17TH ANNUAL SODDY-DAISY, TN COUNT

The Soddy-Daisy count was conducted on Saturday, June 15. Participants included: Bill Haley, Harold Birch, Mike O'Brien, Jade Napier, Tommie Rogers, Nancy Williams, Libby Wolfe, Sherry Barton, David Spicer, and Scott Spicer. It was a hot, sunny day with temperatures from 77-88 F and light winds. Two parties counted a total of 11 party-hours. Once again, butterfly diversity and numbers seemed below normal. The abundant rains this spring have produced a great number of blooming nectar sources. It is puzzling that in a field featuring at least 1000 blooming orange butterflyweed plants, we found almost no butterflies nectaring on them. The only species that seemed to be doing well in the early counts was the Eastern Tailed-Blue. Diana Fritillary was still not found, and the biggest surprise is the total absence of the normally very abundant Sachem.

Totals: Black Swallowtail 1, E. Tiger Sw. - 14, Spicebush Sw. 7, Orange Sulphur 16, Cloudless Su. 3, Coral Hairstreak - 2, Gray Ha. 4, E. Tailed-Blue 372, Summer Azure 3, Am. Snout 1, Variegated Fritillary 2, Great Spangled Fr. 35, Pearl Crescent 11, Question Mark 1, E. Comma 2, Am. Lady 3, Painted Lady 1, Common Buckeye 1, Red-sp. Purple 1, Hackberry Emperor 21, Tawny Emperor 3, Little Wood Satyr 4, Monarch 1, Silver-sp. Skipper 4, Hoary Edge 1, N. Cloudywing 4, Common Sootywing 1, Swarthy Sk. 2, Tawny-edged Sk. 2, N. Broken-Dash 1, Little Glassywing 1, Broad-winged Skipper 1, Dun Sk. 2.
Total: 33 species, 528 individuals.

**American
Lady**
*Vanessa
Virginiensis*

Photos by
Mike O'Brien



A pair of **Eastern Tailed-Blue**, *Everes comyntas*, mating atop an orange butterflyweed bloom. This was by far the most abundant species on the Soddy-Daisy count.



TOTALS FOR THE 14TH ANNUAL LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN, GA COUNT

The 14th annual Lookout Mountain, GA count was conducted on Saturday, June 22, 2013. Participants were: Sherry Barton, Harold Birch, Clay Gentry, Bill Haley, Jade Napier, Tommie Rogers, Susan Schott, Dave Spicer, Scott Spicer, Libby Wolfe. Temperatures ranged from 79-90 F on a mostly sunny day. Again, butterfly numbers and diversity were below average. Two parties put in 11 total party-hours. A big thank you to Dave Spicer, Scott Spicer and Tommie Rogers for splitting from the main group. Their group added an additional 8 species to the species total. One male Diana Fritillary was found atop Lookout Mountain, our first for the year. No Sachems again this week!

Totals: Pipevine Swallowtail 1, Black Sw. 1, E. Tiger Sw. 8, Spicebush Sw. 4, Cabbage White 7, Orange Sulphur 2, Cloudless Su. 3, Sleepy Orange 2, Coral Hairstreak 1, Gray Ha. 3, E. Tailed-Blue 132, Summer Azure 13, Am. Snout 14, Diana Fr. 1, Great Spangled Fr. 10, Pearl Crescent 25, Question Mark 3, Am. Lady 2, Red Admiral 1, Common Buckeye 8, Red-sp. Purple 4, Hackberry Emperor 8, N. Pearly-Eye 3, Carolina Satyr 3, Little Wood Satyr 3, Common Wood Nymph 4, Silver-sp. Skipper 5, N. Cloudywing 1, Wild Indigo Duskywing 2, Least Sk. 1, Crossline Sk. 5, S. Broken-Dash 1, Little Glassywing 3, Delaware Sk. 3, Dun Sk. 3.

Total: 35 species, 290 individuals.

Diana Fritillary (male)
Speyeria diana

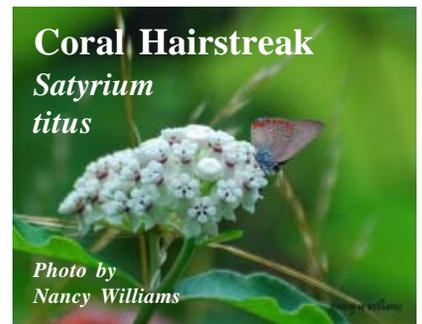
Photo by
Tommie Rogers



White Milkweed, a relative of orange butterflyweed found on area mountaintops, is a nectar source for a **Coral Hairstreak**, *Satyrium titus*, on the Lookout Mtn count.

Coral Hairstreak
*Satyrium
titus*

Photo by
Nancy Williams



TOTALS FOR THE 11TH ANNUAL STEVENSON, ALABAMA COUNT

The 11th annual Stevenson, AL butterfly count was conducted Saturday, June 29, 2013. Participants were: Harold Birch, Bill Haley, J.N. Howard, Tommie Rogers, Dave Spicer, Scott Spicer and Mike O'Brien. It was a completely sunny day and temperatures ranged from 79-91 F. Total number of party hours by 2 field parties was 11.5 hours. Butterfly diversity was still low, but finally Sachems and Fiery Skippers put in an appearance on a count for the first time this year. This is over three weeks behind their usual schedule. The most exciting find was the discovery of the host plant of the Goatweed Leafwing (see next column and page 5 for that story).

Totals: Pipevine Swallowtail 6, Black Sw. 4, E. Tiger Sw. 10, Spicebush Sw. 2, unidentified dk. Sw. 5, Cabbage White 2, Clouded Sulphur 5, Orange Su. 5, Cloudless Su. 23, Sleepy Orange 61, Gray Hairstreak 2, unidentified Hairstreak 1, E. Tailed-Blue 10, Summer Azure 4, Am. Snout 24, Variegated Fr. 19, Great Spangled Fr. 1, Pearl Crescent 21, Mourning Cloak 1, Am. Lady 1, Red Admiral 4, Common Buckeye 8, Red-sp. Purple 3, Goatweed Leafwing 4, Hackberry Emp. 6, Tawny Emp. 5, N. Pearly-Eye 1, Carolina Satyr 4, Little Wood Satyr, Silver-sp. Skipper 4, Least Sk. 13, Fiery Sk. 9, Crossline Sk. 1, N. Broken-Dash 1, Sachem 10, Dun Sk. Immatures: Goatweed Leafwing egg 1, caterpillar 15.

Total 34 species, 272 individuals.



Two Sleepy Orange, *Eurema nicippe*, nectaring on water willow (top) and teasel (bottom). Note differences in their markings.

Photos by Mike O'Brien.



Lifestyles of the Uncommon and Highly Sought-After

Goatweed Leafwing, *Anaea andria*



Goatweed Leafwing egg - found shortly after female oviposited on croton species.

Sometimes there is nothing as lucky as being in the right place at the right time. Such was the case late in the day during the Stevenson, Alabama count. Our group, Nancy Williams, Tommie Rogers, Harold Birch, Mike O'Brien and Bill Haley, pulled up at a regular stop - a spot where we'd seen Goatweed Leafwings on other counts. We were standing at the side of the road, when an orange and brown butterfly flew up and began flitting among some low-growing plants growing on the side of a ditch less than three feet in front of us. It was obviously a female looking for a place to lay an egg. I commented, "I'm thinking that is a Goatweed Leafwing!", but we couldn't be sure. We had to wait until she decided to settle down. Sure enough, the female Goatweed Leafwing landed on one of the plants and proceeded to lay an egg on the underside of a leaf. (See Tommie's photo above.) She then went to another leaf and laid another before flying off.

Wow! I'd always wondered what plant they used for a hostplant and now we knew....and there were probably a hundred growing along the side of the ditch! Although we are not certain of the exact plant species name, according to the books it is a member of the croton family.

Now that I knew where to look, a caterpillar hunt ensued, and it didn't take me more than a minute to spot a caterpillar sitting atop a leaf nearby. (Photo next page.) Harold's handy butterfly app on his phone confirmed it. Yep, it was a Goatweed Leafwing larvae - but it was uncharacteristically exposed. We found out that these caterpillars roll the leaves around themselves to provide shelter and a hiding place. They sit with their somewhat spiky heads at the opening to deter predators. We found several more in several different sizes, within a few feet, all snug in their rolled leaves. Eventually we found at least 15 Goatweed Leafwing caterpillars.

- Continued on page 5

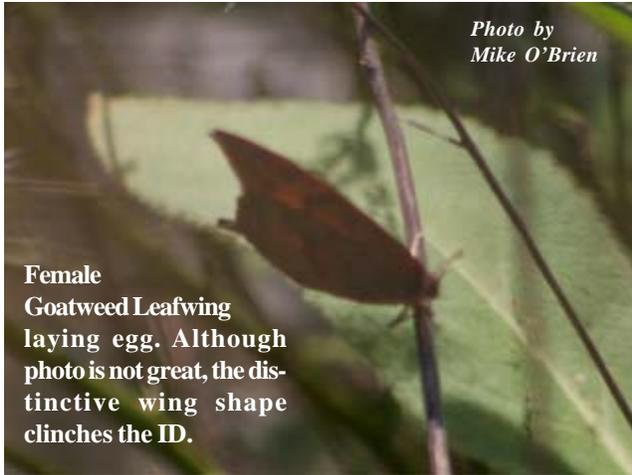


Photo by Mike O'Brien

Female Goatweed Leafwing laying egg. Although photo is not great, the distinctive wing shape clinches the ID.

While we watched, the exposed caterpillar proceeded to wave its head from one side of the leaf to the other, using silk to draw the two sides into a tube. Mike O'Brien got the series of photos below.



Photo by Tommie Rogers

Goatweed Leafwing caterpillar in an uncharacteristically exposed position atop a leaf.



Work begins: Note that the sides of the leaf are already drawn in more than in the original photo in column one. The head swung from one side of the leaf to the other, leaving a thin silk line.



Progress is being made: This photo was taken 3-4 minutes after the preceding shot.



Photo by Mike O'Brien

Late instar caterpillar exposed within its rolled croton leaf. Caterpillars were always head-first in the rolled leaf.



As the caterpillar swings its head and attaches the silk line, the leaf continues to be pulled together. This whole sequence took place within a time span of 15-20 minutes.

Exciting discoveries like this often generate more questions. Unfortunately, we could locate no chrysalids. They are quite well camouflaged and about the same color as the host plant leaves. It is quite possible we overlooked one. Or it could be that the caterpillars use a strategy employed by other butterfly species and go on a "walk-about" before they molt into a chrysalis. Despite some effort, none were found. At least next time we will know the hostplant and we'll have a better idea of where to search.



A view straight into the rolled leaf, with the caterpillar's head blocking the "front entrance".

Photos from June Butterfly Counts

Crossline Skipper

Polites origenes
Soddy-Daisy count



Photo by
Tommie Rogers

Summer Azure

Celastrina ladon 'neglecta'

Tennessee
River Gorge
count



Photo by
Mike O'Brien

**Little Wood
Satyr**

*Megisto
cymela*
Tennessee
River
Gorge
count

Photo by
Tommie Rogers



Delaware Skipper

Anatryone logan
Lookout
Mountain, GA
count

Photo by
Nancy Williams



Eastern Tiger Swallowtail

Papilio Glaucus
(On dead bluegill)

Stevenson,
Alabama
count

Photo by
Mike O'Brien



Spicebush Swallowtail
Papilio troilus
(on fresh horse dung)

Soddy-Daisy count

Photo by
Tommie
Roberts

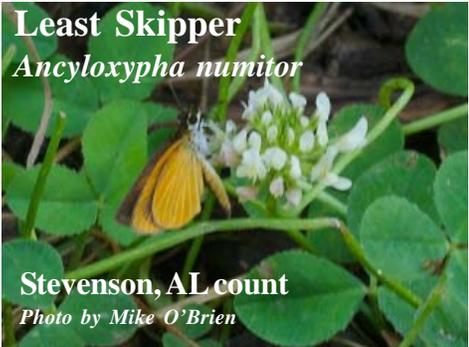


The tiny
Least
Skipper
has a
wingspan
much
smaller than
it's scien-
tific name!

Least Skipper
Ancyloxypha numitor

Stevenson, AL count

Photo by Mike O'Brien



**Northern
Pearly-Eye**
*Enodia
anthedon*

Stevenson,
Alabama
count

Photo by
Mike O'Brien

