

# THE 2013 BUTTERFLY YEAR IN HOWARD COUNTY (PART 1)

BY RICHARD SMITH

After the extraordinary 2012 butterfly year (see *The Goldfinch*, Jan-Feb 2013), Howard County butterfly enthusiasts were not about to let that excitement dwindle. Eight Bird Club members signed up to participate in county site-specific butterfly inventories for a survey project initiated by Sue Muller, Jo Solem, and myself in early May 2013. Sites were chosen by each surveyor (or team), and a standard form listing species and numbers was completed for each visit. Site visits were to be conducted at intervals from every two weeks to once each month. Because of a butterfly's short lifespan and their multiple broods and cyclic emergence rates (for many species) over the course of a season, the numbers of individual butterflies and the cross-sections of species can vary considerably over such weekly and monthly periods. Digital photos were often submitted to me to verify identities of difficult species. Site leaders were as follows: Linda Hunt, Sue Muller, Allen Lewis, Kathy Litzinger, Sue Probst, Jay Sheppard, Kate Tufts, and Jim Wilkinson.

I extend many thanks to these individuals for their participation in this inaugural survey year. Their results will serve as baselines for their respective locations in coming years. I am going to postpone statements of conclusions from the surveys for another year or two, as I think attempting to draw conclusions now would be premature. The accumulated information will be valuable, so I do hope that participants will continue to survey their sites each year and that new surveyors and sites will be added in the future. I wish to especially applaud the efforts of Linda Hunt, who logged at least 25 visits to her Murray Hill survey location alone, and to Kathy Litzinger, who surveyed her yard south of Ellicott City on a daily basis over the entire 2013 butterfly season.

With all of these observational outings, several sightings were obtained for rare species and unusual numbers of uncommon species in 2013. I will now discuss several of these. All references to past and present records will be with respect to Howard County.

Among all butterfly groups, it was the Yellows that earmarked 2012 as a special year; in 2013, it was the Hairstreaks that made a fabulous showing. It started with the appearance of the seldom-seen [Eastern Pine Elfin](#) in K. Litzinger's yard on April 13, followed by sightings by L. Hunt at Rockburn Park on April 25, by J. Wilkinson at Trinity Cemetery on May 1, and again in Kathy's yard on June 11 (a remarkably late date in itself for a notably single-brooded spring species; a voucher photo was also submitted).

The next rare hairstreak sighting came from J. Sheppard who spotted a [Coral Hairstreak](#) at a Hipsley Mill old meadow on June 15. This species had not been reported in the county since the 1970s. Subsequent sightings were logged there by Jay or others on June 21, 24, and June 27. This butterfly species must have been peaking after 40 years, as Bonnie Ott also snapped a photo of one at Mt Pleasant on June 19. Another rare hairstreak also appeared at the Hipsley Mill area. On June 29, I nabbed a photo for the Howard County Butterfly website of a [Striped Hairstreak](#) that was nectaring on common milkweed along a nearby open woodland trail. Multiple sightings of the strikingly blue iridescent [White M Hairstreak](#) were also reported on Sept. 3 and 9 in the Columbia Gateway area (J. Wilkinson and Annette Allor). Before leaving spring sightings, I should highlight that L. Hunt succeeded in securing a shot of the [Southern Cloudywing](#), a first for the

HCBC website, at her Murray Hill location on May 14. This butterfly was recorded from this site over 20 years ago, and it is still the only location known for it in the county. From Linda's survey we know it is frequent there from mid-May into early June and again (second brood) in early August.

The now rare [Baltimore Checkerspot](#) staged a re-appearance (a single specimen) near the Marriottsville Rd. Patapsco River bridge on June 1 during the HCBC Dragonfly Count, as reported by Rick Borchelt and count leader Beth Johnson. (The initial sighting near there was on June 29, 2009.)

Part two is on the next page.

# THE 2013 BUTTERFLY YEAR IN HOWARD COUNTY (PART 2)

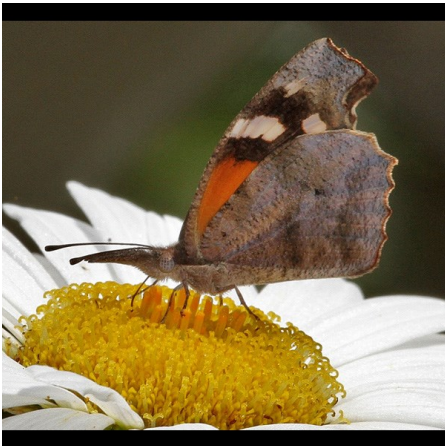
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On July 11 at Columbia Gateway, L. Hunt snapped photos of several specimens of **Broad-winged Skippers**, normally a bay-side species and only first reported in the county by A. Lewis in 2011. Apparently, the phragmites stands in the water containment ponds in this business park have been secretly supporting a population of this species for some time.

In late July, the **Silvery Checkerspot**, only re-reported in the county in 2009 and 2012 after an apparent absence of over 40 years, staged a sudden countywide invasion! The first individual was spotted by K. Litzinger who photographed one at Centennial Park on July 21. On July 24, singles were noted by A. Allor at the Elkhorn Garden Plot and the Robinson Nature Center; later that same day, she spotted over 50 at MPEA! Quoting from her account, "There were so many of them on the dirt and gravel road leading to the fields, I actually had to watch where I stepped."

The rare **American Snout** butterfly made a surprising number of appearances in 2013. In addition to singles at Eden Brook on Sept. 2 (L. Hunt) and Columbia Gateway on Sept. 6 (J. Wilkinson), A. Allor and K. Litzinger spotted four on Aug. 10 at the Mt. Pleasant Children's Garden.

## American Snout



*photo by Kathy Litzinger*

The **Southern Broken-Dash**, a southern grass-skipper species and only first recorded in Howard County last year, has apparently established its occurrence range this far north in Maryland now. Several sightings were logged in 2013, particularly during L. Hunt's home garden survey (Clemens Crossing), from Aug. 4-28. It was also spotted during the HCBC butterfly field trip I led to the Lake Elkhorn powerline area on Aug. 31.

A **Hackberry Emperor**, a species only known from Centennial Park in recent years, was photographed by L. Hunt in David Force Park on Aug. 16.

The **Meadow Fritillary**, a small black and orange-checked brush-foot butterfly, is not often seen locally – that is, until L. Hunt and J. Sheppard surveyed a particularly butterfly-rich horse pasture along Jennings Chapel Rd on Sept. 6 where they counted over 50! The meadow also contained 50+ **Variegated Fritillaries** and 30+ **Common Checkered-Skippers**.

For several years, local butterflyers have searched the county for the rare **Harvester** butterfly. Its last known appearance was on June 1, 1996 along the river trail at Daniels. On Sept. 21, Bonnie Ott video-recorded an early instar of what may be one of its caterpillars among a cluster of wooly aphid nymphs in Rockburn Branch Park. The caterpillars are carnivorous and actually feed on nymphs of wooly aphid species. Early instar caterpillars are not well-marked for positive species identification, but at this point and under the circumstances of its presence with wooly aphids, a Harvester caterpillar is the closest call for this critter. No adult Harvester butterflies have ever been seen in Rockburn Branch Park.

As a surprising end to the 2013 butterfly season, Bonnie also snapped a photo of a fresh and apparently northward migrating **Painted Lady** on November 8 at Mt. Pleasant. This species is known to migrate north from the American Southwest in early spring. It appears they couldn't wait until next spring; and if the winter is mild, some of them may take shelter in brush and survive to continue their northward migration next year as usual.