

THE 2014 BUTTERFLY YEAR IN HOWARD COUNTY

BY RICHARD SMITH AND LINDA HUNT

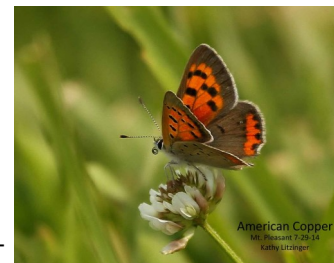
The butterfly season of 2014 had some definite highlights, but it didn't start out that way. People who look for butterflies must sustain a glimmer of hope for these miniature gems and be intrepid explorers to find them. This year gave us the "winter that wouldn't end," with lower than average temperatures through March, above normal precipitation peaking in April (with 8.6 inches recorded), and only half the spring days with any sunshine at all. Our three butterfly field outings in June, July, and August and the two counts at Robinson yielded not only few species but low numbers of all butterflies. A reward of high numbers came to those who persisted, but by then the calendar was registering mid-July. Butterfly numbers and species continued to increase through July, peaking first in the middle and later part of the month and then again in mid-September. Weather and weak butterfly numbers had presented no deterrence to the hardy breed of Howard County Bird Club butterfly people. More than a dozen HCBC butterfly enthusiasts completed 175 days of surveys at three dozen sites from the middle of March until the end of October, finally totaling 10,340 individual butterflies counted and 68 total species for the season. Another dozen members found and reported some of the rarer and more unusual species among these. Monarchs, weak in the season at first, surged by September with a season total of 172, and many common skippers became abundant. A few details and highlights are provided below.

The 2014 season entered full gear in early April with "Azure" discussions, prompted by daily sightings of more than 30 at David Force NRA by Linda Hunt. We say "Azure" because a good dorsal photo (a difficult feat) is needed to narrow them down to species. In April, they can be one of two, the rarer Spring Azure, or the more common "spring form" of the Summer Azure. In the final review, only two uniquely documented specimens passed muster as Spring Azures by Azure expert Harry Pavulaan of Leesburg, VA. These were from Richard Orr at MPEA and Annette Allor at Western Regional Park. Richard Orr and Bonnie Ott pulled out some other nice specialties over the season – four White M Hairstreaks at Sharp's Farm on April 14, and on May 10 Bonnie logged the only Howard County Eastern Pine Elfin for the year, still resident at Rockburn Branch Park. After the virtual invasion of Silvery Checkerspots into Howard County in 2013, only a total of a dozen were recorded countywide in 2014, and only at four locations – Benson Branch Park (May 14 by Grazina McClure), David Force NRA (June 4, 7, Aug. 4, 15 by Linda Hunt), Beaverbrook (July 31 in Richard Orr's garden), and Murray Hill (Aug. 15 by Linda Hunt). At least they are still here. Juniper Hairstreaks, undeterred by any weather factors,



Silvery Checkerspot
Beaverbrook 7-31-14
Richard Orr

appeared around the county throughout April and May, and again later in July. Falcate Orangetips were sighted as usual at Gateway but also at Schooley Mill Park and MPEA. Kevin and Karen Heffernan spotted the first brood of American Coppers at Mt. Pleasant on May 11, and an abundant second brood appeared from July through September. On May 23, Linda Hunt spotted an unfamiliar smaller skipper scurrying among the Southern Cloudywings at Murray Hill. It turned out to be the rare Dusted Skipper, not seen in the county for more than 20 years.



American Copper
Mt. Pleasant 7-29-14
Linda Hunt

Although a scant 652 butterfly specimens had been reported by Memorial Day, some real excitement began on June 8 when Annette Allor photographed an adult specimen of the rare and elusive Harvester butterfly at Rockburn Branch Park, strengthening the case for Bonnie Ott's caterpillar, videotaped in 2013 at roughly the same location, as being of that species. In quick succession,



Harvester
Rockburn Branch 6-9-14
Annette Allor

Jim Wilkinson located and photographed a Harvester east of Marriottsville Rd. near the Patapsco River (PVSP) and another at Rockburn Branch Park, all in June. The connection had now been established of Harvesters with large concentrations of wooly aphid nymphs and large growths of spongy sooty mold (which flourishes on the honeydew left by the aphids) on beech trees. Concentrations of this fungus were found along the Morning Choice Trail in PVSP where Mike and Grazina McClure, Kevin and Karen Heffernan, and Jo Solem spotted both the caterpillar and the butterfly from mid-September to early October. Kevin even nabbed a photo of a female depositing eggs in an aphid cluster. Finally, Linda Hunt photographed a Harvester caterpillar at a new site, the Wincopin Red Trail where, earlier, Jo Solem and Grazina McClure had found more wooly aphids and spongy sooty mold on beeches.



Harvester caterpillar
Morning Choice Tr. PVSP 9-21-14
Kevin Heffernan

In spite of all the Coral Hairstreaks and Meadow Fritillaries reported last year, only singles of each were sighted this year – the

Coral Hairstreak on June 30 at Hipsley Mill (PRSP) and the Meadow at Western Regional Park on July 21; both by Linda Hunt. A single Broad-winged Skipper was reported by Kathy Litzinger (in her yard of course) on August 13. A Hackberry Emperor was spotted at a new location, the Univ. of MD Training Center, by Suzanne Klick on August 13. Common butterflies, including Sulphurs, most Swallowtail species, Lady butterflies, Eastern Tailed-Blues and Skipper species became more plentiful by mid-August. However, there were smaller numbers of especially the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail in 2014 (307 total) compared to 2013 (469 total). Considering that surveyors only counted a



Sleepy Orange
Clemens Crossing 8-2-14
Linda Hunt

total 3,943 butterflies of all species in 2013 when the survey was just starting, the 307 total for 2014 is markedly low for this species. Only eight Sleepy Oranges were seen around the county from July to October; and Cloudless Sulphurs, Little Yellows, and Clouded and Long-tailed

Skippers did not show at all. Remarkably, the Giant Swallowtail, new to the county just two years ago, was sighted three times: at Mt. Pleasant by Emy Holdridge on August 27 and at Kevin and Karen Heffernan's house, less than 1.5 miles east of Mt. Pleasant, on September 3. John McKitterick had the final one, on lantana in his garden again this year, on September 12.



Giant Swallowtail
8-27-14
Emy Holdridge

Fiery Skippers were rare until late September and October when Jim Wilkinson reported several at a productive location just west of Route 1 in Elkridge.

We wish to thank the field trip leaders and especially each of the butterfly surveyors for the dedication that went into the extensive surveys contributed to the bird club county records for 2014: Ann Coren, Jeff Friedhoffer, David Gillum, Kevin and Karen Heffernan, Emy Holdridge, Linda Hunt, Asuncion Lavind, Allen Lewis, Kathy Litzinger, Grazina & Mike McClure, Sue Muller, Richard Orr, Bonnie Ott, Suzanne Probst, Kurt Schwarz, and Jim Wilkinson.

Just from the 2013 and 2014 data, the surveys are revealing astonishingly consistent year to year patterns in butterfly brood cycles. The patterns are especially clear when the entire county's results from a particular year are apportioned into monthly third data bins. It will make an entertaining presentation at a future bird club meeting.