

2015 HOWARD COUNTY BUTTERFLY SEASON

BY RICHARD SMITH AND LINDA HUNT

Documenting butterfly species diversity in a specific locality requires knowledge of species habitat, host plant requirements, and flight periods as well as the time and energy to visit well-known and “off-the-beaten-path” locations. Often, however, in a stroke of serendipity, a rare species will appear on a trellis in someone’s garden or in a newly-seeded public park meadow. 2015 has been such a year, a combination of purposeful search with happenstance.

Ten Howard County Bird Club members completed season surveys of biweekly counts from the middle of March until the end of October at 11 specific sites. An additional 27 people contributed reports of butterflies in their gardens and at another dozen-plus locations. Field trips led by Dick Smith, Sue Muller, or Linda Hunt and butterfly counts by participants of the annual Dragonfly Count and Fall Bird Count contributed county-wide information. In addition, more than 30 Howard County butterfly enthusiasts participated in two season-long efforts aimed at recording numbers of the nationally declining Monarch and also the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, which had significantly lower Howard County numbers in 2014. Bill Hill reported the first of 400 Monarchs on May 16 and Jim Wilkinson the latest on November 17. E. Tiger Swallowtails appeared stronger than in 2014, with Sue Muller reporting the first of 847



Monarch ovipositing by Paul Bade



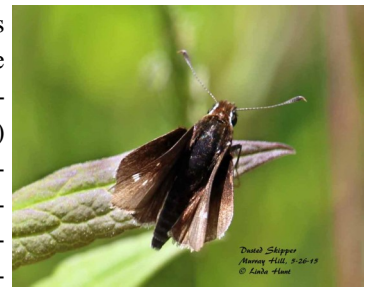
Eastern Tiger Swallowtail by Clayton Koonce

on May 7 and Clayton Koonce the last on September 15. By mid-November these efforts totaled 17,458 individual butterflies representing 70 species, a 40% increase in individuals and two species more than 2014. While a few species seen in previous years (notably Long-tailed Skipper, Giant Swallowtail, and American Snout) were absent in 2015, participants found other rare and unusual species in known and new locations. Following are additional details of the 2015 butterfly season.

As in 2014, low average temperatures in early spring and record-breaking precipitation (12.9” recorded in June) affected spring butterfly occurrence. In addition to the ubiquitous Cabbage White

(2,747), Mourning Four of us visited Black Marsh to see the Red-headed Woodpeckers and were not disappointed. We saw three (possibly four) adults and two immature birds.

Cloak (17), comma (10), and azure (38) species dominated. Attempts were made to distinguish Spring Azures from Spring-form Summer Azures, with Dick Smith determining the former occurring at Western Regional Park in late April. Also in late April Falcate Orangetip (21), Juniper Hairstreak (27), and Pine Elfin (3) at two new locations: Trinity Cemetery and Hipsley Mill (PRSP) emerged. By the end of May, with temperatures regularly nearing a butterfly comfort level of 80°F, the number of species/butterflies rose from 11/315 in March/April to 39/1,381 in May. Common butterflies appeared in waves: Eastern Tailed-Blue in Early May; Pearl Crescent, duskywings, and Zabulon Skipper in Mid-May; and Little Wood-Satyr in Late May. (References to Early (E), Mid (M), and Late (L) correspond to 10-day periods of each survey month.) Zebra Swallowtail (17) appeared in numbers around Pawpaw at Hollofield (PVSP). Bonnie Ott reported this year’s single Silvery Checkerspot, a species abundant in a 2013 irruption and present at three sites last year, at David Force NRA. Linda Hunt recorded six rare Dusted Skippers in the same location where one was seen last year, among an apparent irruption of Southern (39) and Northern (16) Cloudywings from Mid-May to Mid-June near the Gorman NRA.



Dusted Skipper by Linda Hunt

With June rains surveyors struggled to schedule productive outings in only 11 days of even partial sunshine. However, they recorded more than 50 species with double the number of butterflies seen in May. Of special note were strong numbers of Silver-spotted Skipper (134), Little Glassywing (274), Orange and Clouded Sulphurs (364), and Great Spangled Fritillary (98). Meadow Fritillary (85), which had emerged in force in May, and American Coppers (20) in June, continued strong into late summer. Linda Hunt found the Coral Hairstreak (3) again at Hipsley Mill (PRSP), as well as along Annapolis Rock Road and at Warfield’s Pond Park. Linda Hunt also found four early Sleepy Oranges along the Middle Patuxent River and in her garden, observing two ovipositing on Maryland Senna.

Butterfly numbers and species peaked again this year in July (4,156/50), August (3,910/52) and September (4,216/43). In full bloom, the three home gardens surveyed attracted more than

1,700 butterflies of 40 species. Especially notable were the 118 Eastern Tiger Swallowtails at Kate Tuft's garden in July and early August and the variety of skippers (16 species). These included some of the more unusual species such as the four rare Broad-winged Skippers at Kathy



Broad-winged Skipper by Kathy Litzinger

Litzinger's that were possibly utilizing newly discovered Phragmites occurring nearby, and Common Checkered (1), Fiery (5), Crossline (2), Southern Broken-Dash (15), Dun (3), and Ocola (4). Southern migrants missing last year reappeared at the Robinson NC and at Emy's Meadow, the new pollinator/butterfly meadow at Centennial Park. Cloudless Sulphur (39 total) and Sleepy Orange (19 total) were guaranteed sightings from late July to the end of September at both locations. At Emy's Meadow heavy concentrations of blooming Partridge Pea, Grass-leaved Goldenrod, and Blue Mistflower became magnets for Monarchs, Variegated and Meadow Fritillaries, American Ladies, Clouded and Orange Sulphurs, and Common Checkered-Skipper.



White M Hairstreak by Kevin Heffernan

Finally, in late August and September people reported sightings of rare butterflies. Jim Wilkinson found the single Little Yellow (August 31, Thomas Viaduct Middle School) for 2015. White M

Hairstreaks were in short supply this year. None were seen in June, only three at Gateway (August 27-30, Jim Wilkinson and Linda Hunt), and one in Clemens Crossing (September 13, Linda Hunt and Kevin Heffernan). After an abundance of sightings of Beech aphids, along with Harvester caterpillars and butterflies in 2014, this species lived up to its reputation and seemingly vanished from previous sites. However, Annette Allor did find two Harvesters at Rockburn

Branch Park on August 14, and Linda Hunt found two Harvesters in a new location at Hollofield (PVSP) on September 6. After three years of Howard County Bird Club members looking for a good location with Common



Hackberry Emperor by Pat Greenwald

Hackberry trees for hackberry butterflies, on August 15 Pat Greenwald found a Hackberry Emperor puddling on her patio.

Over the next two weeks Pat recorded four Hackberry Emperors near newly-discovered Hackberry trees in the Sykesville area.

Common skippers provided surveyors with ample opportunities to practice their identification skills. Hordes of Sachem (M-July/L-July 374 and L-Aug/M-Sept 1,539), Silver-spotted (M-July/M-Aug 737), Least (M-July/L-July 180), Peck's (L-July 219), Tawny-edged (L-July/E-Aug 141), Little Glassywing (E-Aug/M-Aug 209), and Zabulon (M-May/L-May 149 and M-Aug 171) skippers were abundant. Ocola, although normally rare, staged an irruption this year, appearing early and staying late (Kathy Litzinger, July 16 and October 22) for a total of 32 for the season. On August



Clouded Skipper by Jim Wilkinson

21 Jim Wilkinson found the rare Clouded Skipper at Mt. Pleasant, the only record for it this year. And on August 28, Rick Borchelt diverted his excursion through Central Maryland to take in the notable snowcone stand at Woodstock Road, and then spotted the rare Hayhurst's Scallopwing in the community gardens at nearby Mt. Pleasant. This species was last seen in the county in 1994.

Warm summer weather continued into early November but numbers of individuals and species slowly declined, with only 21 species and 814 individuals recorded in October. These included our late season species: Common Checkered (32), Sachem (59) and Fiery (48) skippers; Clouded and Orange Sulphurs (146); Eastern Tailed-Blue (48); and Variegated (28) and Meadow (50) Fritillary, Pearl Crescent (106) and Common Buckeye (67). Even Cabbage White dwindled from 64 in the first 10 days of October to 13 in the last 10 days of the month. Linda Hunt recorded the season's last Sleepy Orange, in winter colors, on Patuxent Branch Trail on November 3. Reports of Monarchs (22) migrating south continued into November.

We wish to especially thank the field trip leaders and each of the surveyors who completed season surveys for 2015: Kevin and Karen Heffernan, Linda Hunt, Clayton Koonce, Kathy Litzinger, Sue Muller, Suzanne Probst, Kurt Schwarz, Kate Tufts, and Jim Wilkinson. Additionally, we wish to thank all those who took the time to count and report Monarchs, E. Tiger Swallowtails and other butterflies seen at home or around the county: Paul Bade, Gill Bentley, Alicia Buxton, Ward Ebert, Sherry Fisher, Jeff Friedhoffer, Linda Giampalmo, Pat Greenwald, Bill and Gayle Hill, Mike Kerwin, Suzanne Klick, Jenny Kranz, Asuncion Lavrin, Mike and Grazina McClure, Woody Merkle, Bonnie Ott, Howard Patterson, Norma Petersen, Paul Petkus, Dick Smith, Sharon Smith, Jo and Bob Solem, Ann Strozyk, and Eva Sunell.

A brief comparison of data from 2013 to 2015 reveals consistent year to year patterns in butterfly brood cycles regardless of weather. Also, each year additional species have been documented, and existing species have been found in new locations.