

2024 Howard County Butterflying Year

By Kevin Heffernan

Last year we completed the 11th year of the Howard County Butterfly Survey. A total of 928 surveys were submitted by 58 people and 44,909 minutes were spent in the field. We found 70 species this year and 21,278 individual butterflies. We now have seen a total of 81 species and 236,747 individual butterflies in the 11 years of the survey. The 482,380 minutes in the field = 8,043 hours or 201 40-hour work weeks, equivalent to 3.87 years of effort. We also conducted six butterfly walks which 165 people attended.

A project of this size does not succeed without a lot of help and dedication. So, some big thank yous are in order, particularly to the contributors. The following 23 people submitted 10 or more butterfly reports this year: Linda Hunt (156), Kathy Litzinger (139), Clayton Koonce (91), Jim Wilkinson (63), Annette Allor (56), Janet Lydon (42), Jim McFadden (39), Kevin Heffernan (38), Woody Merkle (33), Cris Ausin (32), Jennifer Kanera (27), Barbara White (23), Lynn Gregg (19), Susan Tucker (19), Bill Hill (17), Sharon Smith (17), Andrea Cockran (16), Robyn Evans (16), Pam Perna (14), Mike Riley (12), David Ryan (10), Heather Dulaney (10), and Kurt Schwarz (10). Thank you also to the other 35 contributors as well. An extra big thank you to Linda Hunt and Kathy Litzinger who submitted 156 and 139 reports respectively. A big thank you also to the walk leaders: Woody Merkle, Linda Hunt, Kathy Litzinger, and Cris Ausin. Another big thank you goes to Bob Solem for providing the tools to get the data from emails to a spreadsheet where it can be analyzed, expanding the photo gallery, posting trip reports, and a host of other things. Finally, a huge thank you to Kathy Litzinger for co-chairing the survey and for helping organize all of the data from the year which is a large and time-consuming task.

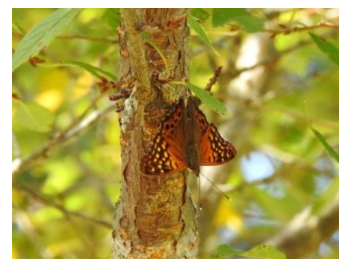
First Butterfly of the Year: The first butterfly reported this year was an Eastern Comma seen by Cheryl Farfaras on February 9th. It was the third earliest date that the first identified butterfly of the year was seen during the survey. *A total of two butterflies (both Eastern Commas) were seen in February. For comparison, 19 were reported in 2023.*

Peak Years: Six species had ten-year high counts for the survey: Long-tailed Skipper (4), Common Sootywing (26), Sachem (6,436), Dusted Skipper (7), Gray Hairstreak (223), and American Lady (100). Four species had the second highest count in the ten years: Pipevine Swallowtail (38), Red Admiral (149), Little Wood-Satyr (332), and Ocola Skipper (62). Overall, 14.3% of the 70 species found were peak or second highest count years.

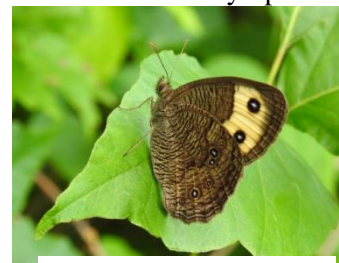
The 6,436 Sachems were the highest count for any species for any year during the survey. The only other two counts above 6,000 in a year were Sachem in 2023 (6,037) and Cabbage White in 2021 (6,032).

Low counts: The following seven species had ten-year low counts for the survey: Southern Cloudywing (4), Swarthy Skipper (2), Peck's Skipper (151), Zebra Swallowtail (8), Orange Sulphur (612), Northern Pearly-eye (38), and Common Wood-Nymph (1). An additional eight species had their second lowest count during the survey. These include Tawny-edged Skipper (22), Cabbage White (2,333), Clouded Sulphur (245), Banded Hairstreak (6), White M Hairstreak (3), Meadow Fritillary (12), Viceroy (11), and Monarch (364). Overall, 21.4% of the 70 species found had their lowest or second lowest count during the survey. For two species, only a single individual was found, Common Wood-Nymph and Tawny Emperor.

Howard County Watch List: Southern Cloudywing has only been found in one location. Their numbers were never high but they have dropped every year since 2019. We reported four this year. This could be that the Murray Hill powerline location has not been visited as often in the last few years particularly since the Dusted Skipper was not being seen there. Swarthy Skipper reports have been six or fewer the last four years. Peck's Skipper numbers have dropped significantly each of the last four years. The 151 reported in 2024 is 20.4% of the 738 reported in 2020. The three lowest number of sightings for Tawny-edged Skipper have been the last three years. The 22 reported in 2024 is 25% of the 88 reported in 2020. Common Wood-Nymph numbers have only reached double digits in 2015 when 11 were reported. There have been five or fewer for eight years of the survey. There have been six reported in the last three years total. This year, we found a single individual. This could be a species that we miss in the near future. Monarch numbers were steady during the survey until 2022. There were 928 Monarchs reported in 2022, 374 in 2023 and 364 in 2024. This is worth keeping an eye on.



Tawny Emperor
Annette Allor



Common Wood-Nymph
Annette Allor

Common Checkered-Skipper numbers had dropped for five years in a row from a peak of 331 in 2017 to 14 in 2022. In 2023, they rebounded slightly to 20 but this number was still historically low. A total of 86 were reported in 2024, most of them at Little Portion Farm showing, once again, the value of a single location. American Copper numbers had dropped for six out of the seven years from 2016 to 2023. In 2023, the number reported was nine. This year, 42 were reported, all by Linda Hunt and all of them at Foxfield Farm. Great Spangled Fritillary numbers have dropped from 168 in 2018 to 39 (2019), 45 (2020), 32 (2021), and a low of 23 in both 2022 and 2023. A total of 71 were reported in 2024, many of them at Schooley Mill Park. These three species all had a rebound year but are worth continuing to monitor.



Monarch- Cris Ausin

Of the 70 species found this year, 18 (~26%) had <10 individuals reported. These include *Northern Cloudywing* (9), Southern Broken-Dash (9), Harvester (9), *Juvenal's Duskywing* (8), Zebra Swallowtail (8), Coral Hairstreak (8), Appalachian Brown (8), **Dusted Skipper** (7), Banded Hairstreak (6), *Long-tailed Skipper* (4), *Southern Cloudywing* (4), *Northern Broken-Dash* (4), *White M Hairstreak* (3), *Swarthy Skipper* (2), *Hackberry Emperor* (2), *Tawny Emperor* (1), and *Common Wood-Nymph* (1). Ten of these (italics) were also on last year's "<10 individuals" reported list. One in bold was not seen last year. The other seven were not on last year's list.

New Early and Late Dates: There were 14 new early dates established this year. These were Clouded Sulphur (3/13), Sleepy Orange (3/14), Falcate Orangetip (3/29), American Lady (4/9), Pipevine Swallowtail (4/16), Zabulon Skipper (4/23), Sachem (4/30), Peck's Skipper (5/2), Harvester (5/2), Least Skipper (5/3), Hobomok Skipper (5/3), Swarthy Skipper (5/16), Northern Pearly-Eye (5/21), and Appalachian Brown (5/21). There were also eight new late dates recorded this year. They were: Silver-spotted Skipper (11/5), Little Glassywing (11/6), Gray Hairstreak (11/11), Red-banded Hairstreak (11/11), American Lady (11/11), Clouded Skipper (11/18), Black Swallowtail (11/20), and Common Buckeye (11/27). The Early – Late Date spreadsheet has been updated and is on the website.

Notes from the year:

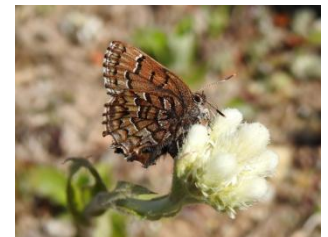
- Bonnie Ott found a Clouded Sulphur on March 13th, a full 15 days earlier than its previous early date of March 28th. It is possible that this butterfly overwintered as an adult.
- Annette Allor found a Sleepy Orange on March 14th which was three weeks earlier than its previous early date on April 4th. This butterfly was a winter form indicating that it definitely had overwintered as an adult.
- Pipevine Swallowtails continue to do well in Barbara White's garden. She reported 22 of the 38 seen this year. Kathy Litzinger reported 11 including one on April 16th, 13 days ahead of its previous early date of April 29th.
- Bill Hill found a Zabulon Skipper on April 23rd, eight days ahead of its previous early date on May 1st. Annette Allor found a Sachem on April 30th, two days ahead of its previous early date of May 2nd. The Zabulon Skipper and Sachem are the first two sightings of any grass skipper before May 1st during the survey.
- Annette Allor found a Harvester on May 2nd, a whopping 20 days ahead of its previous early date of May 22nd.
- On May 24, 2023, Annette Allor found what was possibly an Appalachian Azure on the Wincopin Trail. Without more documentation, Annette was not sure of the ID, and we did not count it at her request. This species was considered rare in Howard County in 1993 and extirpated by 2012. We did not refind it this year. This species uses Black Cohosh as a host plant.
- Annette Allor photographed a Cloudless Sulphur caterpillar on May 30th. The early date for this species is May 29th.
- From early in 2024, it was obvious that American Lady was going to have a good year. In 2023, a total of 23 were reported. This year, 32 were reported by the end of April. The previous annual high number of 76 (2019) was exceeded on July 19th. A total of 100 were reported this year.



Pipevine Swallowtail
Barbara White



Pipevine Swallowtail
Barbara White



Eastern Pine Elfyn
Annette Allor

- Annette Allor found two Eastern Pine Elfins on April 14th. She found a third one on April 23rd. This is the first time that this species has been found in the county since 2020.
- American Copper had a bounce back year. After only 13, 16 and 9 being reported in the last three years, 42 were found this year. All 42 were found by Linda Hunt at Foxfield Farm.
- Great Spangled Fritillary also had a bounce back year. The 71 found more than tripled last year's total of 23.
- Common Checkered-Skipper also had a good year. The 86 reported more than quadrupled last year's total of 20.
- A total of 26 Common Sootywings were found this year. This exceeds the total number found in the last seven years combined. Most of these were found at Little Portion Farm (St. Anthony's Shrine). Annette Allor found 10 at Little Portion Farm on July 26th. This report alone exceeds the total for each year in the first 10 years of the survey.
- Common Sootywing uses Lamb's Quarters as its host plant. Hayhurst's Scallopwing which has only been found once (one individual in 2015) during the survey, also uses Lamb's Quarters. We will be on the lookout for this species next year.
- Cris Ausin photographed an Appalachian Brown near the Davis branch at Mt. Pleasant. This is the first possible before 2018 when the site was reworked into wetlands after the Ellicott City flood. The Appalachian Brown is the 69th species on the Howard County Conservancy's butterfly list. Our best guess for the next species is Checkered White or Little Yellow.
- The single Common Wood-Nymph found by Annette Allor brings the 11-year total for this species to 53 individuals. This is the lowest number for any species that has been found all 11 years of the survey.
- According to the literature, Black Swallowtails use asparagus as a host plant. Annette Allor confirmed that with a photo on May 22nd.
- Jack Litzinger found a Little Wood-Satyr in his and Kathy's yard on June 13th. That is the 54th species found in their yard.
- On September 12th, Jim Wilkinson found an aberrant Common Buckeye. The stripes on the forewings are red instead of the usual white. It looks like a cross with a Mangrove Buckeye. Silvery Checkerspots continue at Ilchester Elementary School. A total of 138 were reported for the year. Most of them were reported at the school.
- A total of 223 Gray Hairstreaks were found this year. This established a new high count exceeding the previous high count of 184 in 2017. A total of 70 of these were reported at St. Anthony's Shrine including 21 on August 12th.
- On July 5th, Kathy Litzinger observed a Sleepy Orange ovipositing in her garden. She went out to photograph the eggs. Amazingly, she watched as the caterpillar emerged from the egg. She has photos of each step in the life cycle: the adult ovipositing the egg, the caterpillar recently emerged from the egg, the chrysalis, and the recently eclosed adult. Amazing!
- Kathy Litzinger found a Joro spider on August 12th.



Common Sootywing
Annette Allor



Appalachian Brown
Cris Ausin



Common Buckeye
Jim Wilkinson



**Sleepy Orange egg and
Caterpillar**
Kathy Litzinger



Hackberry Emperor
Vicki Sattler

- Annette Allor photographed a pair of Fiery Skippers mating on October 6th. Fiery Skippers do not overwinter in the Mid-Atlantic. They are migrants and cannot survive the winter here. Annette emailed Harry Pavulaan and he wrote this back. “The sad thing is that many of these seasonal migrants continue to move north, even breeding, then perish with the first hard freeze..... Nature can be cruel at times.”
- We are recording a drop in the number of Monarchs in the survey. A total of 928 were found in 2022 followed by 374 and 364 in 2023 and 2024 respectively. That is a 60% drop. We will be monitoring this species closely.
- One of the target butterflies on the August 10th walk was Hackberry Emperor. Only two of this species were seen this year. Not only was one seen during the walk, but it landed on my hand and I was able to walk it around and show everyone on the walk a close-up view.
- Three species accounted for more than half of the total number of butterflies reported this year. They are Sachem, Cabbage White and Eastern Tailed-Blue.

Butterfly of the Year: Each year we award a “Butterfly of the Year” to a species that had an outstanding year. This year the award goes to the Dusted Skipper. This species was not seen in the county for >20 prior to the survey. It was found in three locations on Maryland’s Western Shore: Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Soldier’s Delight and on a single hill in the Murray Hill neighborhood. Linda Hunt initially found this species in 2014. It was found in each of the first five years of the survey (2014 – 2018). In 2019, the Columbia Association dumped dredge from the lakes next to the hill and the butterflies were not recorded from 2019 through 2023.



Dusted Skipper
Annette Allor

Linda kept returning in the subsequent years in the hope that the skipper would return and her persistence paid off this year. The seven recorded matches the peak year count in 2017.

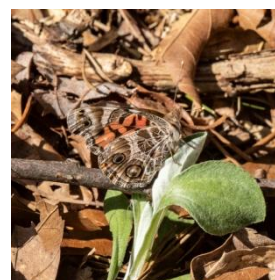
Last Butterfly of the Year Contest: We again had the “Last Butterfly of the Year” contest with the winner receiving a “Butterflies of the Mid-Atlantic” field guide. The winner this year was Terri Berkheimer who sent in a photo of a Common Buckeye seen at Belmont on November 27th. Congratulations, Terri. A total of 12 species were the last ones found in a given year during the survey. These include: Cabbage White, Orange Sulphur, Clouded Sulphur, Cloudless Sulphur, Sleepy Orange, Eastern Tailed-Blue, Variegated Fritillary, Pearl Crescent, Eastern Comma, Painted lady, Common Buckeye, and Monarch.



Common Buckeye
Terri Berkheimer

Photos and Videos from participants: This year we, once again, have received many excellent

photos of butterflies. Some of the photos are proof of a sighting. Others are to request help with an ID which we enjoy receiving. Please do not hesitate to reach out with a request for an ID. Some of the photos we receive are simply eye-popping. Many of these photos will be in the emails that I send out every few weeks during butterfly season and in the PowerPoint presentation given annually at the January Bird Club meeting.



American Lady ovipositing on Pussytoes
Kevin Heffernan

New Data / Tools for the Butterfly Survey: In the eleven years that the butterfly survey has been taking place, you surveyors have reported over 236,000 butterflies. With were able to publish flight times, early and late dates, and overwintering strategies for each of the 81 species that we have found. These are all on the Howard County Bird Club website. They are in pdf format and can be downloaded to your phone for use in the field.

What you can do to help butterflies:

- Provide a Pocket Habitat for butterflies
- Plant a native plant pollinator garden and landscape for caterpillars
- Leave the leaves
- Reduce the size of your lawn (or mow less frequently)
- Reduce mosquito spray and insecticide usage
- Get rid of invasive plants
- Embrace the wild in your garden

Another big thanks to all of you for another very successful year for the Howard County Butterfly Survey.



Harvester
Annette Allor



Black Swallowtail
ovipositing on asparagus
Annette Allor



Great Spangled Fritillary
Kevin Heffernan



Southern Cloudywing
Linda Hunt