

2025 Howard County Butterfly Year

By Kevin Heffernan

Last year we completed the 12th year of the Howard County Butterfly Survey. A total of 1,257 surveys were submitted by 77 people and 69,128 minutes were spent in the field. We found 72 species and 26,728 individual butterflies. The number of surveys submitted, minutes in the field and number of individual butterflies reported are all new records for the survey. We now have a total of 81 species and 261,722 individual butterflies seen in the 12 years of the survey. That number is not a typo. We exceeded a *quarter million butterflies* recorded in the survey this year. The 551,933 minutes in the field = 9198 hours. We have now *spent more than a full year in the field*, a full year being 60 minutes / hour * 24 hours / day * 365 days). We also *exceeded 10,000 surveys* submitted during the survey. Finally, in 2025, we conducted six butterfly walks which 179 people attended. Dick Smith would be proud.

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 20 people submitted 20 or more butterfly reports this year: Clayton Koonce (146), Kathy Litzinger (138), Linda Hunt (121), Annette Allor (109), Kevin Heffernan (69), Jennifer Kanera (57), Cris Ausin (47), Emily Schweich (45), Jim McFadden (45), David Ryan (39), Jim Wilkinson (37), Karan Blum (37), Woody Merkle (35), Barbara White (29), Pam Perna (28), Sue Probst (27), Sharon Smith (26), Janet Lydon (24), Susan Tucker (22), and Sue Mueller (20). Thank you also to the other 57 contributors as well. An extra big thank you goes to four people who contributed >100 reports this year, Clayton Koonce, Kathy Litzinger, Linda Hunt, and Annette Allor. Big thank yous also go to the walk leaders: Woody Merkle, Linda Hunt, Kathy Litzinger, Cris Ausin and Annette Allor. 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, the photo gallery, posted trip reports, and a host of other things. Also, a huge thank you goes 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.

In 2016, Bob Solem designed the butterfly report form that automated the butterfly reporting system. It worked flawlessly for nearly 10 years. On August 11th, it suddenly stopped working during the busiest time of the year for the survey. Bob worked tirelessly for days trying to get it up and running again. He thought that he had it fixed twice, but each fix still had some issues. As a backup plan, Gregg Petersen asked Steve Luke to come up with a different system. He came up with a Google Forms solution that is working well. The original system was down for two weeks. We manually entered data into this system from the reports that we received during those two weeks; many people held off submitting their reports until after the system was back up and running. A HUGE thank you goes out to Steve Luke for designing the new system on short notice, and to Bob Solem for keeping the original system running for nearly 10 years and for working many hours trying to fix the problem.

First Butterfly of the Year: The first 11 butterflies of the year were found on March 10th by

Annette Allor and Linda Hunt. Annette found five Mourning Cloaks and four Eastern Commas. Linda found one of each. Annette was out earlier than Linda, and her first butterfly was a Mourning Cloak (see photo).



Peak Years: Fourteen species had 12-year high counts for the survey: Common Sootywing (53),

Least Skipper (779), Fiery Skipper (851), Hobomok Skipper (37), Broad-winged Skipper (29),

Pipevine Swallowtail (53), Zebra Swallowtail (57), Spicebush Swallowtail (687), Harvester (25), Juniper Hairstreak (51), Spring Azure (2), Summer Azure (652), American Snout (83), and Hackberry Emperor (21). Ten species had the second highest count in the 12 years: Juvenal's Duskywing (28), Horace's Duskywing (101), Clouded Skipper (21), Ocola Skipper (148), Eastern Tiger Swallowtail (2,367), Sleepy Orange (418), Coral Hairstreak (14), Gray Hairstreak (216), Pearl Crescent (1,389), and Monarch (1,015). Overall, 33.3% of the 72 species found had peak or second highest count years.

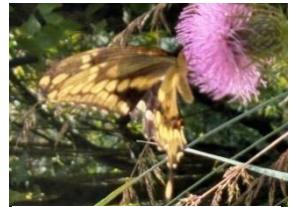


Low counts: The following four species had 12-year low counts for the survey: Southern Cloudywing (4), American Copper (8), Banded Hairstreak (3), and Eastern Tailed-blue (1,241). An additional three species had their second lowest count during the survey. These include Cloudless Sulphur (9), Red Admiral (45), and Viceroy (10). Overall, 9.7% of the 72 species found had their lowest or second lowest count during the survey. For two species, only a single individual was found: Dusted Skipper and Giant Swallowtail.

Dusted Skipper
Annette Allor

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 total. Northern Cloudywings, have had about half the total number of Southern Cloudywings. These have been found in low numbers in multiple locations. Only four of these were recorded this past year as well.

Swarthy Skipper annual totals have been six or fewer in the last four years. This year, four were recorded.



Common Wood-nymph
Annette Allor

Banded Hairstreak had a peak of 51 reported in 2022. The last three years, 11, six and three have been reported. They are getting very difficult to find.

Common Wood-Nymph numbers have only reached double digits in 2015 when 11 were reported. Their number has been five or fewer for nine years of the survey. A total of eight have been reported in the last four years. This year, Annette Allor, found the only two of them at Mt. Pleasant. This could be a species that we miss in the near future.

American Copper numbers had dropped for six out of the seven years from 2016 to 2023. In 2023, the number reported was nine. In 2024, 42 were reported, all by Linda Hunt and all of them at Foxfield Farm. Linda was not able to get out to Foxfield Farm as often in 2025, and the number reported dropped to eight. This is a species that we need to watch carefully and to try to find additional locations.



Harvester (4/18/2025)
Annette Allor

Dusted Skipper has been found in a single location in low numbers each of the first five years of the survey. It was missed in each of the next five years. In 2024, seven were found. In 2025, only a single individual was found. This is another species to keep an eye on.

Of the 72 species found this year, 14 (19.4%) had <10 individuals reported. These include Cloudless Sulphur (9), American Copper (8), **Mulberry Wing (7)**, *Tawny Emperor* (6), *Southern Cloudywing* (4), *Northern Cloudywing* (4), *Swarthy Skipper* (4), *Northern Broken Dash* (3), *Banded Hairstreak* (3), *Long-tailed Skipper* (2), **Spring Azure (2)**, *Common Wood-Nymph* (2), *Dusted Skipper* (1), and **Giant Swallowtail (1)**. Nine of these (italics) were also on last year's "<10 individuals" reported list. Three in bold was not seen last year. The other two were seen but not on last year's list.



Orange Sulphur
Jim McFadden

New Early and Late Dates: There were three new early dates established this year. These were Harvester (4/18), Clouded Skipper (5/8), and Ocola Skipper (6/18). There were also four new late dates recorded this year. They were: Appalachian Brown (9/20), Broad-winged Skipper (9/21), Tawny-edged Skipper (10/26), and Silver-spotted Skipper (11/7). The Early – Late date spreadsheet has been updated and is on the website.

Notes from the year:

- Two Common Wood-Nymphs were recorded this year, both by Annette Allor. This species has the distinction of the one that has been seen in all 12 years of the survey that has the fewest total number of individuals found (55).
- Jim McFadden found a likely overwintering Orange Sulphur on March 25th at MPEA.
- On April 8th, Kevin Heffernan reported an Eastern Tiger Swallowtail. It was cold and windy with a temperature of 47 degrees.
- Kevin Heffernan and Jennifer Kanera found a winter form Sleepy Orange at Centennial Park on April 14th. Sue Muller also found one on April 23rd. This is the third year in a row that overwintering Sleepy Oranges have been found.
- A survey record 53 Pipevine Swallowtails were reported this year. Kathy Kaberle had three broods on her Pipevine this year. Pipevine Swallowtails continue to do well in Barbara White's garden.
- Swallowtails had a good year with Pipevine, Zebra and Spicebush having record years in the 12-year survey. Eastern Tiger Swallowtail had the second highest annual count.



Zebra Swallowtail
Pam Perna



Eastern Tiger Swallowtail (aberrant)
Jenny Kanera

- On August 15th, Jenny Kanera found an aberrant Eastern Tiger Swallowtail in her yard. The photo was forwarded to Harry Pavulaan who stated that he had never seen one like it. The next day, Jenny found an aberrant Red-spotted Purple, also in her yard.
- Last year, Annette Allor confirmed that Black Swallowtails use asparagus as a host plant. This year she confirmed that they use Lovage as a host plant as well.
- A new high count of 21 Hackberry Emperors was reported in 2025. The previous high count was 15 in 2017. Eight Hackberry Emperors were found on the Mt Pleasant butterfly walk on August 19th. This met or exceeded the annual totals of eight of the 12 years of the survey. It was also the first walk where both Emperors were found.
- Kevin Heffernan photographed three Coral Hairstreaks on a single Common Milkweed flower on June 21st at Mt. Pleasant. This number exceeded the total number for 2014 and 2018.
- A total of 53 species have been recorded at St. Anthony's Shrine. We have only known about this location for three years.
- A total of 215 Cloudless Sulphurs were recorded in 2024. We found only nine in 2025.
- Common Sootywing has never been an easy find in the county. Over the first 10 years of the survey, a total of 40 individuals were recorded. In year 11, 26 were reported, which tied the total of the previous seven years. In 2025, 53 were reported. We found a private farm in western Howard County that had Lamb's Quarters and Pigweed, both of which are their host plants.
- Fiery Skipper was very common this fall. The 851 individuals reported greatly exceeds the previous high count of 474 in 2019.
- 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. In 2025, we found a second location and the number reported climbed to 190.
- A high count of 223 Gray Hairstreaks were found in 2024. This was, in large part, to finding a new location, Little Portion Farm. We followed that up with 216 reported in 2025.
- Harvesters have classically been a difficult find in the county. A total of 25 were reported this year. That number exceeds the total seen in the first eight years of the survey (18). The previous high count was 15 in 2023.
- A total of 24 Meadow Fritillaries were reported this year. Half of them were seen on June 3rd on a private farm.
- We are closely tracking the number of Monarchs each year. A total of 928 were found in 2022 followed by 374 and 364 in 2023 and 2024 respectively. That is a 60% drop. This year, we recorded 1,015. It will be interesting to see what numbers are recorded in their overwintering site in Mexico this year. We also had high counts this year for both Monarch caterpillars and chrysalises.
- Five species accounted for more than half of the total number of butterflies reported this year. They are Sachem, Cabbage White, Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, Pearl Crescent, and Silver-spotted Skipper.



Coral Hairstreaks
Kevin Heffernan



Common Sootywing
Annette Allor

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 Spring Azure. Two individuals of this species were seen in 2014 by Annette Allor (Western Regional Park) and Richard Orr (MPEA). It was not reported for the next 10 years. This year, Annette found one on April 4th at the Shrine of St. Anthony's and Cris Ausin found a second one on April 9th at the same location. Harry Pavulaan confirmed the ID of both sightings.



Spring Azure
Annette Allor



Last Butterfly of the Year Contest: We again had the “Last Butterfly of the Year” contest this year. The winner this year was Karan Blum who sent in a photo of an Eastern Comma at St. Anthony’s Shrine on November 26th. This is the third year that the date of the last butterfly seen was November 26th. Congratulations, Karan.

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 Power Point presentation given annually at the January Howard County Bird Club meeting.



Eastern Comma
Karan Blum

New Data / Tools for the Butterfly Survey: In the 12 years that the butterfly survey has been taking place, you surveyors have reported over 261,000 butterflies. With this vast amount of data, we 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 thank you to all of you for another very successful year for the Howard County Butterfly Survey.