

# Camera Review: SONY DSC-H5

by Dave Hanson

For the past four years many butterflyers have been using the very versatile Sony Mavica CD line of digital cameras. These are the CD-250, 300, 400, and 500. The allure of these models was the excellent human interface and the large sunlight visible LCD screen. The CD-300 was reviewed by this author in the Summer 2002 issue of *American Butterflies*. The CD-300 had a 3.0 Megapixel (Mp) resolution and its macro capability was astonishing. Storage for all the CDs was on a removable compact disc that could be placed into any computer's CD tray and the images became available at once. Discs were cheap and offered an easy way to archive your valuable photos. By mid 2004, the CD-500 (5Mp) had become the gold standard for many digital butterfly photographers.

Then in late 2004 Sony introduced a new "prosumer" camera, the DSC-H1. Jeffrey Glassberg purchased one and demonstrated its capabilities several times in his trips to the Rio Grande Valley and NABA International Butterfly Park. The 12x telephoto, and image stabilization raised several eyebrows but old habits die hard and many of us were reluctant to give up our CD-500s since the H1 had no better resolution (5Mp) than the CD-500.


In February 2006 Sony announced new H models. The H5 has a resolution of 7.2 Mp and a HUGE LCD screen. Although the H5 was not shipped to stores until mid May, the internet was buzzing. The new H5, in addition to the 12x zoom and large LCD had super image stabilization, many preset scene selections, ultra fast autofocus, almost instant on, an ISO 1000 setting for shooting in impossibly low light levels, a 30 fps 640x480 movie mode with sound, a real optical color viewfinder, and a storage chip the size of a postage stamp that can hold currently as many as 4 gigabytes of data. I have noticed recently that these

chips can be purchased for as low as \$20 per Gigabyte. These chips plug directly into your computer and can transfer 100 images in about a minute. The batteries are two standard 2500 MAh, NiMH rechargeables and can be purchased for about three dollars apiece. They last a long time and a three hour charger comes with the camera.

Independent reviews of the camera have been gratifying. You may go to the website: [www.dpreview.com](http://www.dpreview.com) and see a complete and detailed review of the H5. The customer rating for the H5 is 4.25 stars out of 5.

Jeff Glassberg reports that unlike the telephoto systems on other digital cameras he has tried, the H1 (and now the H5) usually finds and focuses on the butterfly even at 12x (although the quality of the image is inferior to that obtained in macro mode). For example, the first record of a Cafe-au-lait Hairstreak from Mexico (see *American Butterflies* 13:3, Fall 2005) was established with the H1 at a distance of more than 20 feet.

In summary, the Sony DSC-H5 is a very versatile yet easy to use digital camera that should be considered not only for all outdoor nature work but also for family use as it has a wonderful "point and shoot" mode right on the selector dial for those folks who tend to shy away from the technical aspects of digital photography. Current "street" price on the H5 ranges from \$379 to \$479 on the internet. My advice would be to go to Circuit City (and possibly Best Buy) who advertises it for \$404 and has a liberal return policy. One further note: I have recently discovered that the H5's zoom lens can be extended out as far as 2.5x and it will *still* focus down to an inch away from the subject. This really grabs super high resolution shots of small butterflies.

If you still haven't gone digital there is no time like the present. 



Top: A Crimson Patch lords it over a Red-spotted Patch for the H5. Nov. 9, 2006. Bentsen SP, Hidalgo Co., TX.

Right: The image of an Orange Mapwing, captured by the H5 at full 12x telephoto extension. Aug. 6, 2006. Lagunas de Montebello, Chiapas, Mexico.

