

Badger ButterFlyer

The e-Newsletter of the Southern Wisconsin Butterfly Association **SEPT - OCT, 2011**

WEB SITE: <http://www.naba.org/chapters/nabawba/>

1 NEXT MEETING Thursday, November 3

Meet at 7:00 p.m. in Madison at the Warner Park Community Recreation Center, 1625 Northport Drive.

Programs:

1) **2011: The Year in Butterflies** (Mike Reese)

2) **Butterflies of the Lower Rio Grande Valley** (Karl Legler)

The Year in Butterflies will be a half-hour presentation that is a retrospective and summary of the amazing sightings and some of the most remarkable photographs that wisconsinbutterflies.org has received during 2011. Some species were unusually abundant while others were scarce (some populations “crashed”). What southern strays turned up along Lake Superior? How did endangered species do this year? What was being seen in butterfly gardens? Was 2011 a very good butterfly year? Yes it was! Mike Reese will provide the overview.

Butterflies of the Lower Rio Grande Valley will be a half-hour presentation on why this area has the most butterfly diversity in the United States, a survey of the butterflies that make up that diversity, resources that provide more details, butterfly hotspots, including the NABA National Butterfly Center, and the best time to go to Texas. Handouts will be provided.

Mike Reese receives reports on many thousands of butterflies and photos from all over the state at his award-winning website, wisconsinbutterflies.org, and scours the state to find and photograph Wisconsin butterflies.

Karl Legler is a long time birder and butterflyer, author of Dragonflies of Wisconsin, and sometime visitor to Texas.

Everyone is welcome to attend this free program. The meeting will last from 7:00 p.m. to 8:45 p.m. We will have displays, books, handouts and plenty of time afterwards to enjoy snacks and refreshments, and talk with our speakers and other butterfly enthusiasts.

DIRECTIONS: On Madison’s north side, from the intersection of Sherman Avenue and Northport Drive (= Hwy 113) go west on Northport Drive for about 1/4 mile, then turn south into Warner Park. Turn immediately right into the Community Center parking lot. When you enter the Community Recreation Center, we will be in the meeting room on the left.

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2 HIGHLIGHTS OF AVOCA / BLUE RIVER FIELD TRIP

On August 13, in spite of rain in the morning, the clouds miraculously parted for the start of the Avoca/Blue River field trip and it remained sunny for about 4 1/2 hours. This allowed us to



Up to our hats in Prairie !

get to most of the sites we wanted to visit. In mid-afternoon a downpour ended the trip. Considering the rain threat we had a good turnout. In a prairie area (above) we hit the jackpot with 16 Giant Swallowtails and encountered a total of 32 Giants for the day! Unusual butterflies were found, including immigrants from the South (Giant Swallowtail, Common Checkered-Skipper and Common Buckeye). These last two are not common in Wisconsin most years. We found a total of 24 species listed below. (Some less common butterflies are marked in **bold type**.)

Red-spotted Purple 2
 Eastern Comma 2
 Question Mark 2
 Eastern Tailed-Blue 10
 Summer Azure 2
Common Buckeye 3
 Pearl Crescent 13
 Hackberry Emperor 4
Aphrodite Fritillary 6

Great Spangled Fritillary 6
 Red Admiral 3
 Monarch 19
 Common Wood-Nymph 10
Common Roadside Skipper 2
 Least Skipper 6
 Peck's Skipper 1
Common Checkered-Skipper 2
Common Sootywing 6

Silver-spotted Skipper 3
 Clouded Sulphur 4
 Orange Sulphur 1
Giant Swallowtail 32
 Eastern Tiger Swallowtail 10
 Cabbage White 2



Common Roadside Skipper



Common Checkered-Skipper
 (Photo by Dorothy Legler)



Giant Swallowtail
 (Photo by Stan Rehm)

3 Fall Butterflies at Pheasant Branch Conservancy

By Dreux J. Watermolen

Pheasant Branch Conservancy is home to about 60 of the 158 butterfly species that have been documented in Wisconsin. These range in size from the tiny Least Skipper (Wisconsin's smallest butterfly) up to the Black and Tiger Swallowtails (our largest butterflies). For the past several years, Friends of Pheasant Branch, along with the Southern Wisconsin Butterfly Association, Madison Audubon Society, and Wisconsin Wetlands Association, has sponsored fall fieldtrips to the conservancy to observe butterflies and their habits. Observations from these fieldtrips provide an interesting look at the variable nature of the conservancy's butterfly populations.

Each kind of butterfly can be found only at certain times of the year—during the adult form's 'flight period.' Some butterflies, like the nonnative Cabbage White, have lengthy flight periods and can be found in the conservancy throughout the entire growing season. Others, like the Edward's Hairstreak, have shorter flight periods or only occasionally pass through Pheasant Branch. In addition, butterfly populations fluctuate, with some species being abundant one season or year, but not in others. Depending on whether the season has been unusually cool or warm, flight periods may be advanced or delayed. Droughty conditions can shorten butterfly life spans and flight



periods. Unusually cool, wet seasons also can adversely affect butterfly numbers.

This year's fieldtrip took place on August 27, when a group of 28 people joined me to explore the prairie, oak savanna, and springs in the northern end of the conservancy. We observed about 60 individual butterflies of 12 different species, including several quite colorful examples. Although 2011 has been an overall "good" year for butterflies, those in the conservancy were somewhat inactive during our Saturday morning visit, and our group had to look carefully to find them, especially the smaller species.

This was a different experience from last year's late August outing when Cabbage Whites, Clouded Sulphurs, and Pearl Crescents were unusually abundant. During that trip, the 13 participants encountered over 100 individuals of 18 species, watched a Monarch caterpillar feeding, and observed the tiny eggs laid by a Clouded Sulphur. Our 2009 fieldtrip took place a little later in the season, when 25 people joined

naturalist/photographer Ann Thering and me on September 12. That group found 11 different species, including several that entertained our group with highly coordinated air shows as they attempted to find (or fend off) potential mates.

The accompanying table summarizes observations from all three recent outings. These observations illustrate the continually changing character of the butterfly community. For example, three species observed in 2009 were not found in 2010, and seven of those seen in 2010 were not observed again in 2011. On the other hand, 10 species observed in 2010 had not been seen during the previous year's trip.

The commonest butterfly in 2009 was the Monarch, largely because our fieldtrip occurred during the peak of this species' southward migration to the mountains of central Mexico. When we visited in 2010 and 2011, however, this grand migration was just getting underway and Monarch numbers were a little lower. Last year, the commonest species were Cabbage White, Clouded Sulphur, and Pearl



American Snout

Crescent, all of which seem to have had a very good year in 2010. In addition, that visit rewarded us with a couple of unusual species. The **American Snout**, a rare stray from the south, has a protruding 'nose' that mimics the stem of a leaf. This species often hides by clinging to a bare vertical stick, looking like a dead leaf.

The Little Yellow is also a scarce stray from the south. Both were new records for Pheasant Branch, not previously having been documented here. In 2011, one of the commonest species observed was the stunning yellow and black Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, a species that was relatively rare in 2009 and not seen at all during our 2010 trip.

Several additional species, including Bronze Copper, Purplish Copper, Gray Hairstreak, Sachem, Painted Lady, and another fall immigrant, Variegated Fritillary, which were not seen during our recent fieldtrips, have been observed by others in the conservancy at this time of year. Perhaps, we will encounter them during future outings.

Summary of Butterflies Observed in Pheasant Branch Conservancy during Recent Fall Field Trips (Species in Bold Represent New Records for the Conservancy)

Species Observed	2009	2010	2011
Black Swallowtail	4	13	4
Eastern Tiger Swallowtail	1		11
Cabbage White	9	Many	8
Little Yellow		1	
Clouded Sulphur	3	Many	1
Orange Sulphur	1	4	
Bronze Copper	1		
Eastern Tailed-Blue	2	4	1
Summer Azure		5	1?
American Snout		1	
Great Spangled Fritillary		2	
Meadow Fritillary	1		
Pearl Crescent		Many	6
Red Admiral		4	
Common Buckeye		8	4
Viceroy		4	1?
Monarch	19	17	14
Silver-spotted Skipper		3	1
Least Skipper	1	3	6
Fiery Skipper		1	
Peck's Skipper	1	1	
Total species observed	11 species	18 species	12 species

The diversity and abundance of butterflies in the conservancy is testament to the preservation and active management of the high quality habitats found in the area. A complete checklist of Pheasant Branch butterflies is available online at www.dnr.wi.gov/org/es/science/publications/SS_1012_2005.pdf. To see color photographs of these species, and other butterflies, check out the "Wisconsin Butterflies" website (www.wisconsinbutterflies.org).

Knowledge of Pheasant Branch Conservancy's wildlife is always changing and additional species continue to be added to the list of the area's fauna. Your observations and discoveries can help fill the gaps in our knowledge. So, please get out and explore this green oasis in our urban landscape and let us know what you find.

4 BUTTERFLY OF THE YEAR: EASTERN TIGER SWALLOWTAIL

2011 was an amazing year for the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail. They were very numerous. Everyone was seeing them, reporting them, finding them in their yard or garden, or photographing them.



Eastern Tiger Swallowtail (female)

These butterflies are large, with up to 6 1/2" wing span. This Swallowtail and the Giant Swallowtail are Wisconsin's largest butterflies. They have "tails" reminiscent of Swallows, their namesake.

The caterpillars eat leaves of many different trees, such as Wild Cherry, and they overwinter as a chrysalis. This butterfly has two generations per year, the first flies in May, the second flies in July-August. The photo shows the female which has iridescent blue spots on the hindwing.

Although most females are yellow, some are black. Females with this dark phase gain protection from bird predators by mimicking the appearance of the toxic Pipevine Swallowtail. Dark females are often mistaken for the Black Swallowtail, but

the dark Tigers can be recognized as this species because the dark coloration is just an overlay and the underlying "tiger stripes" remain faintly visible in the wings, especially on the underside of the hindwing.

The Eastern Tiger Swallowtail is found in almost all of the eastern U. S., but here in southern Wisconsin, it is at the northern edge of its range. And in 1991 Lepidopterists concluded that the northern Wisconsin version of this Swallowtail was really a different species (Canadian Tiger Swallowtail). The Canadian Tiger almost never has dark females.

With so many Tigers around this year we saw many instances of courtship and interaction. These large and conspicuous butterflies have inspired many people to take more notice of butterflies and to learn more about them.



Some females are dark but can be recognized as E. Tiger Swallowtail by the underlying tiger stripes, especially on the underside of the hind wing (arrow).

5 BUTTERFLIES REPORTED IN AUGUST-SEPTEMBER TO

www.wisconsinbutterflies.org

NEW FEATURE: A new feature has been added to the Wisconsin Butterflies website. Now reports are marked ★ or ☆ if they are either a county photo record or a county sighting record, respectively. These records go back only to the first year of the website, 2005, but recent records of the past 7 years are more important than old records. For example, 25 year old record tells us nothing about the current presence or absence of that species in the county!

Also, the reports of the previous 6 years (2005-2010) archived on the website, have been retroactively revised to include these county record marks. This information is summarized in the Wisconsin range maps for each species, found under the species accounts.

COMMON BUTTERFLIES

The Common Buckeye is one of our most beautiful butterflies but usually it is anything but common in Wisconsin. It is an immigrant that comes northward into the state, usually in small numbers. But this year it has been common so that about 1 out of every 4 or 5 reports included one or more Buckeyes. Both the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail and the Giant Swallowtail had good populations in the state this fall.

VERY RARE STRAYS The most unusual encounter this fall was a **Horace's Duskywing**, which is only the 5th time one has been seen in Wisconsin! (A 6th record was found in October.) **Pipevine Swallowtail** continued to be present at Olbrich Gardens until the last sighting reported on September 12. At least one was present in Milwaukee at Boerner Botanical Garden.

SIGHTINGS OF SOUTHERN IMMIGRANTS

A **Southern Dogface** was discovered in Dane County August 4. (Subsequently a small breeding colony of 3 to 5 individuals was present until last observed on October 10.) Six reports of **Checkered White** were received in August to early Sept. **Little Yellows** were unusually scarce this year. Three appeared at different locations in the space of just 5 days (Aug. 3 - 7)! No-one reported **Dainty Sulphur**! Only 2 **Painted Ladies** were reported this fall. **American Snout** had 6 reports and was observed as late as Sept 29. **Sachem** and **Variegated Fritillary** had a strong flight into the state with records throughout the fall. Two **Reakirt's Blues** were reported in early August, both in Bayfield County! **Gray Hairstreak** was last reported on Aug. 18. The **Common Checkered-Skipper** is usually rare but there were 11 reports throughout August and September.

Keep sending your sightings to Mike Reese's outstanding, award-winning, web site:

www.wisconsinbutterflies.org

The database this builds up is a tremendous resource crucial to our understanding of Wisconsin butterflies! You can submit a sighting and have the option of submitting a photo to the site, and see what butterflies are being seen around the state, and enjoy the photos that others are taking, as the butterfly season unfolds. **TRY IT!**

The Badger ButterFlyer flits to you every month (every other month in winter). The next issue will be in DECEMBER.

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SWBA

The Southern Wisconsin Butterfly Association (SWBA) is a non-profit Wisconsin chapter of the North American Butterfly Association (NABA) which is the largest organization of people interested in butterflies. SWBA promotes public awareness, conservation and the enjoyment of butterflies through observation with close-focusing binoculars, chapter field trips, educational meetings, photography, butterfly gardening, monitoring and travel. SWBA's events are open to the public.

To become a member of SWBA simply join NABA. Membership benefits include 2 color quarterly magazines "American Butterflies" and "Butterfly Gardening". Please use the membership form on the SWBA Web site at <http://www.naba.org/chapters/nabawba/>

Our e-Newsletter, the Badger ButterFlyer, will be published monthly in spring to fall, and every other month in winter. Send any news notes to the editor, Karl Legler, at karlindot@charter.net

To stop receiving this e-Newsletter, simply send an email to the above editor's address.