



During the Fall: The Sixth Biennial NABA Members Meeting

With each passing fall, the crush of birders converging on the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas is being supplemented by a growing — and equally dedicated — cadre of butterflies. The rewards of visiting South Texas at this time of year are compelling, since the seasonal build-up of migrants and strays in “The Valley” during October is dramatic, whether one’s pursuit is birds or butterflies. On the butterfly side, with permanent observation posts springing up throughout the area — notably at the gardens of the NABA International Butterfly Park (NABA Park) — “first United States records” are accumulating rapidly. In short, this is a remarkable moment for butterfly enthusiasts to be visiting southern Texas.

In October of 2004, this high-profile destination was the venue for the North American Butterfly Association’s sixth biennial meeting. The immediate cause for the gathering was the arrival of the biennial meeting date, in a year when it finally was “Texas’ turn.” But this was also the first opportunity for many participants to explore the newly dedicated NABA Park. I believe it is fair to say that no one who attended the conference left without being impressed, and usually inspired.

Before discussing the biennial meeting itself, however, we must note the continuation of an uncanny string of NABA successes as far as weather is concerned. Although temperatures were decidedly on the warm side seasonally (in the nineties every day), there



by Rick Cech

Two visitors to the festivities: Opposite page, a Band-celled Sister at Roma.

Above, a female Silver Emperor at Santa Ana NWR.

were no interruptions due to storms or inclemency, or even too much heavy wind. Just a week earlier, the Texas Butterfly Festival (an established annual event that draws many to the Valley) had experienced raw, cold rain and wind on their opening day. Fortunately, this did not impair the Festival’s overall success. But NABA dodged even this minor bullet.

Of course, the avoidance of cold rain showers in the Valley does not rank as an achievement on the same level as barely missing a late season snowstorm in Colorado in 1998 (*American Butterflies*, Vol. 6:4, 1998), or skirting forest fires and a volcano in Bend, Oregon in 2002 (*American Butterflies*, Vol. 10:4, 2002). But attendees would have sorely regretted *any* occurrence during the confer-

ence, however mundane, that might have forced the Valley’s many butterflies out of sight, even for an instant.

A Movable Feast

That said, let’s turn to the conference itself. Actually, it is difficult to portray this particular meeting as a unitary event, with a distinct beginning and end. Technically, it ran from Thursday, October 21 to Sunday, October 24. But many participants arrived a week or more earlier to attend the Texas Butterfly Festival (October 14-17), and many added a side jaunt into Mexico, either before or after the meeting (e.g., on the NABA-sponsored “after-trip”). And at any time between sunup and night-fall, individuals could be found prowling the