

How to Herd Cats

Cats are notoriously difficult to control. Just when one thinks one has taught them to behave, a particularly sassy cat will crawl out of its enclosure and sprawl upon the sofa, leaving lasting impressions if one is not careful.

Despite the difficulties inherent in finding or rearing cats, many pillars of society — well, at least members of our society, the North American Butterfly Association — are including the immature stages of butterflies in their butterflying activities. Some butterflyers focus on caterpillars when there aren't many adult butterflies flying, while its raining, for example, or at night! Some other butterflyers focus all their energies on caterpillars all the time.

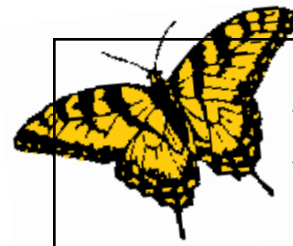
The Rio Grande Prix of Butterflying, a NABA event held each October in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, allows participants to tally as "species seen" butterfly species that they've only seen as caterpillars. However, over the first three years of this event, no team has tallied an additional species by this method, despite the fact that all those night-time hours are just begging to be used productively. Will this be the year?

Although there is clearly a tremendous amount to be learned about adult butterflies, the world of caterpillars has large expanses of terra incognita. For a fair number of butterfly species, even the caterpillar foodplant(s) is unknown, and the behavior, polymorphisms and phenology is incompletely known for most species. So, careful observations may provide valuable information to the community of butterfly enthusiasts. You can enjoy the challenge of finding caterpillars in the wild, or the satisfaction that you receive from nurturing these ducklings through to swanhood. Actually, many of the "ugly ducklings" are strikingly beautiful in their own right!

Caterpillars are the immature stages of butterflies and moths. Most NABA members know that the immature stages of insects are larvae, a term most often applied to the immature stages of insects that undertake complete metamorphoses. So, referring to the butterfly caterpillars as larvae is not incorrect. However, the word larva is also correctly applied to the immature stages of any invertebrate animal. In contrast, the widely used and generally understood term "caterpillar" is more precise in that "caterpillar" refers specifically to the immature stages of butterflies and moths while beetle, or jellyfish larvae, for example, are very different creatures.

Frequently referring to caterpillars as "larvae" is a lot like constantly referring to human beings as "chordates" or as "eukaryotes." These are accurate, but imprecise, statements that don't make too much sense unless you're point is to compare humans with other, distantly related, chordates, or eukaryotes, or unless you're trying to impress someone with your knowledge. A growing cadre of scientists, for example John Burns and Dan Jantzen (Burns, J.M. and Janzen, D.H. 2001 [2002]. Biodiversity of Pyrrhopygine skipper butterflies in the Area de Conservation Guanacaste, Costa Rica. *J. Lep. Soc.* 55: 15-43) use the more precise (and therefore more scientific) term "caterpillar" rather than the vague "larva."

Whatever you call these not-yet-ready-to-fly bags of promise — worms, larvae or caterpillars, — it's time to give them their due. The 2006 NABA Photo Contest will, for the first time, have a special category for photographs of the immature stages of butterflies.



The North American Butterfly Association (NABA)

For the Love of Butterflies

Please photocopy this membership application form and pass it along to friends and acquaintances who might be interested in NABA

Yes! I want to join NABA, the North American Butterfly Association, and receive *American Butterflies* and *The Butterfly Gardener* and/or contribute to the creation of the premier butterfly garden in the world, NABA Butterfly Park. The Park, to be located on approximately 100 acres of land fronting the Rio Grande River in Mission, Texas will use native trees, shrubs and wildflowers to create a spectacular natural butterfly garden that will importantly benefit butterflies, an endangered ecosystem and the people of the Rio Grande Valley.

Visit our web site at www.naba.org

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Name: _____

Address: _____

Special Interests (circle): Listing, Gardening, Observation, Photography, Conservation,
Other _____

Tax-deductible dues enclosed (circle): Regular \$30 (\$60 outside U.S., Canada or Mexico), Family \$40 (\$80 outside North Am.). Special sponsorship levels: Copper \$50; Skipper \$100; Admiral \$250; Monarch \$1000. Institution/Library subscription to all annual publications \$50 (\$80 outside U.S., Canada or Mexico). Special tax-deductible contributions to NABA (please circle): \$125, \$200, \$1000, \$5000. Mail checks (in U.S. dollars) to: NABA, 4 Delaware Rd., Morristown, NJ 07960

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