

Renewal

I recently participated in NABA's 2nd Florida Regional Meeting. The three days of camaraderie, beautiful landscapes and some sensational butterflies made the meeting a great success.

Alana Edwards and Kathy Malone did a terrific job of organizing the meeting and Buck and Linda Cooper, Dean and Sally Jue, Kathy Malone and Alana Edwards and Dennis Olle were keen and expert field trip leaders (I tagged along with Dennis). Sue Arnold generously admitted everyone into her spectacular butterfly garden where photographers gleefully spent the day capturing seven species of swallowtails in pixels. Back here at the NABA National office, Lisa Lewis deftly kept track of all the meeting arrangements. So despite flying back to New Jersey with a foot infection that put me in the hospital, I was feeling pretty good.

Except for one thing — the future. The future is young people, and there were precious few at the meeting. I'm not very good at guessing ages, but I'd guess that, despite the presence of a few people in their 40s (forgive me if I've overlooked anyone younger than that), the median age of attendees was probably closer to a basketball score than a football score. Even if you're unfamiliar with basketball or football, I think you'll understand my point.

Of course, its wonderful having folks around that have lots of experience, but it's important to balance the present with the future. Our mission is to grow the number of people that are involved with butterflies, so that we can create a larger constituency that will vote and work for their conservation. Butterflies need an influx of young butterflies to ensure that their future is secure.

So, why was the age scale tilted upward at the meeting? One obvious reason is that retirees have more time to devote to personal interests — such as butterflying. Still, although there was a pre-meeting field trip on Friday,

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the “official” meeting was on Saturday and Sunday, days when most people don't need to work. On the one hand, a majority of people in their thirties or forties are married and raising children, with hectic schedules that leave little time for butterflying. On the other hand, it's probably true that most people manage to find the time to engage in some of the activities that they really value.

So, we're left with the unsettling thought that perhaps the percentage of people aged 20 through 45 who are seriously interested in nature is less than it was thirty years ago. I certainly won't be the first to do so when I point out that children raised on overwhelming diets of TV, computers, video games and supervised “play dates” are less likely to consider the natural world as an important part of their lives.

Is there anything that we can do? Well, one thing that we *are* doing is bringing in thousands of children to the National Butterfly Center and not only teaching them about butterflies but also making the connections between butterflies and plants, bees and birds.

Another idea was proposed by Rita Venable at the Florida meeting. She related how the Middle Tennessee chapter had held a special butterfly walk for families with young children. Many families came and the both the children and their parents were excited by the possibilities of butterflies. This seems like something that each chapter can do fairly easily.

And, even if there isn't a NABA chapter where you live, you can go to your local school and offer to give a program about butterflies. I hope that each of you will renew your membership in NABA, but bringing young people to butterflying — that's real renewal!

