



Atala Chapter News

SUMMER/FALL 2005

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Do you know this butterfly??
Answer on Page 2

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Mangrove Skippers by Teri Jabour

Skippers are often dismissed as LBJs - 'little brown jobs' - the same term birders use to describe sparrows. Mangrove Skipper *Phocides pigmalion*, however, defies that term with its distinctive large size (wingspan of 2 inches or more) and colorful broad wings of brown and iridescent blue. Its use of red mangrove *Rhizophora mangle* also removes it from a group of skippers that are considered general-



ists (ones that use a variety of host plants). Red mangrove is a dominant plant species of tropical and subtropical saltwater lagoons and estuaries along the central and southern coast of Florida, from Melbourne to the Florida Keys on the east coast and Pinellas County to the 10,000 islands of the Everglades on the west coast. Because of its tropical host plant, Mangrove Skippers can be found in the Caribbean, Cayman Islands, Mexico, Belize, and south to Argentina.

I first noticed Mangrove Skippers in my yard several years ago. Are you thinking that I must live on the edge of a mangrove swamp

along a brackish lagoon? I don't, but I am lucky to live just a short distance from John D. MacArthur Beach State Park, one of the few parcels of natural tropical hammock and mangrove swamps remaining in south Florida. The Mangrove Skippers have just a short distance to fly over Lake Worth Lagoon to feast in my garden. They visit a variety of flowers, including beach and pineland lantana, porterweed, buddleia, Jamaican caper, and jatropa. The skipper in the picture is on a "stray" *Lantana camara* at MacArthur Beach State Park; I would never plant it in my yard because it is an invasive pest plant that hybridizes with native lantana, and its fruit poisons cattle and horses.

Mangrove Skippers belong to the large Hesperioidea family and the subfamily of Pyrginae—Spread-winged (Broad-winged) Skippers. Skippers, called so because of their quick, skipping flight, are not always grouped with butterflies. Some scientists classify skippers within the superfamily of Papilionoidea but as an intermediate form between butterflies and moths. Others categorize them as a separate superfamily (Hesperioidea), which means they have the same rank as butterflies and moths. They have similarities to moths: a thick body; forewings that fold flat against the body when resting; and a large head on the caterpillars with a narrow neck on the first thoracic segment. Another unique feature of skippers is the hooked antennae instead of the "knobs" of butterflies or "feathers" of moths. Also like moths, skipper caterpillars commonly weave silk and leaf shelters to avoid predators during the day. Finding these leaf shelters on the red mangrove is one way to look for Mangrove Skippers. Its caterpillar is also outstanding with red and yellow stripes. Out of a total of 160 butterfly species in Florida, there are about 67 species of skippers, most of which



Red Mangrove with Propogules

(continued on page 5)

Who Am I?? Butterfly Quiz

Learning your Smaller Sulphurs



by Linda and Buck Cooper

In Florida there are three common small sulphur butterflies: two in the genus *Eurema* – Barred Yellow (*E. daira*) and Little Yellow (*E. lisa*) and one in the genus *Nathalis* - Dainty Sulphur (*N. iole*). All three of these fly in similar habitat and often fly together. All three have seasonal forms – wet season (summer) and dry season (winter.) In Barred and Little Yellow there is sexual dimorphism (males and females differ in appearance). Additionally, in south Florida/Keys there are Caribbean races of Barred Yellow. Don't let all these factors confuse you as we will concentrate on simple ways to tell these species apart.

Let's start with the easiest one – Dainty Sulphur. Common along roadsides and disturbed areas they are closely tied to their host plant Spanish Needles (*Bidens alba*). Flying low to the ground, these tiny sulphurs often show a bar across the dorsal wings in flight and a hint of orange color. When they land, like all sulphurs, they close their wings. Of the small sulphurs though, Dainty tends to sit with the forewing more upright. The ventral hindwing may appear 'frosted' depending on the season (darker in dry/winter months). Almost always the orange on the forewing shows along with several small dark spots towards the wing margin. The dorsal forewing dark margins are easily seen through the wings when the Dainty is perched.



Dainty Sulphur



Barred Yellow—wet season

Barred Yellow does not appear to be a yellow butterfly EXCEPT in flight. It may or may not show the bar across the lower edge of the forewings in flight – depending on the season and the sex of the butterfly. Wet season forms are white on the ventral hindwings. Dry season forms are rusty colored on the ventral hindwings. They may or may not have scattered markings



Barred Yellow—dry season

Yellow uses a variety of host plants in the legume family and seem especially fond of Pencil Flowers (*Stylosanthes hamata*) and joint vetches (*Aeschynomene sp.*).

Little Yellow usually appears yellow in flight though white females add to the confusion.

Both seasonal forms are usually yellow on the ventral hindwings but remember those white females. The amount of brownish/reddish markings, usually much more distinct than Barred Yellow, depends on the season and the sex of the butterfly. Little Yellow has two distinctive small dark spots on the ventral hindwing near where the wing joins the body. These two spots allow this species to be easily separated from any other yellow butterfly. Here is where your close-focusing binoculars come into play. These spots are almost impossible to see with the naked eye. It also has dorsal dark wing margins that can sometimes be seen when the butterfly is perched. Little Yellows also use several host plants in the legume family such as Wild Sensitive Pea (*Chamaecrista nictitans*) and Partridge Pea (*Senna fasciculata*).

These bright low-flying butterflies add a touch of sunny color whenever they are encountered and, once you master them, will add to your confidence in identification.

Photo Credits: Dainty Sulphur, Barred Yellow-dry season, and Little Yellow-wet season by Linda Cooper. Barred Yellow-wet season and Little Yellow by Alana Edwards.

on the ventral hindwings. Usually wet season forms are totally unmarked on the ventral hindwings, appearing white, while dry season forms usually have scattered marks across the rusty hindwings. The dorsal forewing and hindwing dark margins show through when Barred Yellow is perched especially if sunlit from behind. Barred



Little Yellow



Little Yellow—white form/female

Upcoming Field Trips

DON'T FORGET YOUR FIELD GUIDE AND BINOCULARS!!



Saturday, July 30, 2005—Butterfly Count at Highlands Hammock. A chance to see numerous species of swallowtail. Make sure you bring bug repellent and shoes you don't mind getting wet! Also, bring picnic lunch. **Directions:** Take I-95 to Blue Heron. Go West to the Beeline (710). The Beeline through Indiantown to SR70. Go West on SR70 through Okeechobee to SR98. Go North on SR98 to SR27. Go North on SR27 into Sebring. Take a left onto Highlands Hammock Rd. (also called 634. Landmarks: traffic signal and Bar-B-Que restaurant). We will meet at the Ranger Station at **9:00am**. ~2 ½ hours from WPB.

Sunday, September 11, 2005—Hypoluxo Scrub Natural Area—This county-owned property, formerly known as Overlook Natural Area, is approximately 100 acres. This is a good opportunity to see Zebra Swallowtail. **Directions:** Take Hypoluxo Road east from I95 to just past Overlook Road. There is a parking lot (unpaved) on the south(right hand) side just past the two story office building. We will meet in the parking lot at **9:00am**. When finished at this spot, we will go to Lantana Nature Preserve, a site developed from a former landfill, this preserve, encompassing 6 1/2 acres of walking trails, wildlife & native flora, is a rare semitropical coastal hammock that has been set aside to protect and nurture South Florida's natural resources. There is also a butterfly garden. Located at 400 East Ocean Avenue, between A1A and the Intracoastal Waterway. **Directions:** From Dixie Highway, turn east on Ocean Avenue, go over the Intracoastal bridge, and the entrance is

on the left, just past the small bridge. Parking is available in the preserve as well as in assigned spots at the Carlisle.

September 24 and 25, 2005—Gainesville weekend! We will spend the weekend exploring the Gainesville area. First, a trip to the new butterfly house at the McGuire Research Center at the University of Florida. Then we'll spend the afternoon at Kathy Malone's new home in High Springs where she lives on 5 acres. We will find a hotel or bed and breakfast in the area and then on Sunday morning we will visit Marc Minno's garden! This will be a weekend that you don't want to miss. Call Alana at 561/706-6732 if you think that you would like to attend this once-in-a-lifetime field trip.

Saturday, October 15, 2005—Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve - Guided by park biologist Mike Owens. Bring food and water for the day. This is a butterfly count for the Preserve. Take I-95 to Atlantic Blvd. (Exit 37) West. This turns into the Sawgrass Expressway. Take the Sawgrass south to I-75. Go West on I-75 to State Road 29 (mile marker 80). Go South on SR29 about 15 miles to County Road 837 (a/k/a Jane's' Scenic Drive). Turn right onto CR 837 and go about 1/2-3/4 mile (road curves sharply to the right). We will meet at the office (brown) 100m North of the fire tower at 8:15am. Allow 3 hours driving time from WPB. If you plan to attend, call the hotline so that we can arrange for carpooling and know who to expect: 561/706-6732.

Sunday, October 22, 2005—11:00-3:00pm. Garden Party at the Edwards' Home in Delray Beach. This is a fundraiser for the Atala Chapter. Directions to the Edwards home will be sent out over email or given by calling 561/706-6732. Butterfly plants will be sold to raise money for the club.

Upcoming Meetings

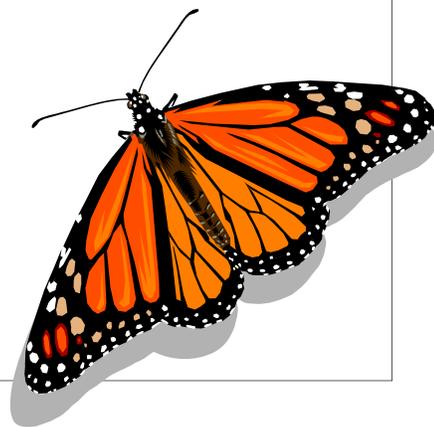
Meetings will now be held at Pine Jog Environmental Education Center in West Palm Beach. Take I-95 North to West Palm Beach (Forest Hill exit.) Turn West on Forest Hill Blvd. & go to Haverhill Road. Go North on Haverhill to Summit Blvd. Turn left (west) on Summit Blvd. Look for the Pine Jog entrance on the right (north) side of Summit Blvd. **Meetings begin at 7 p.m.**

Only two meetings are scheduled for this fall and you don't want to miss either of them!

August 1, 2005—Marc Minno, author of many butterfly books including Florida Butterfly Gardening,

Butterflies of the Keys and the new Florida Butterfly Caterpillars (see page six for more info) will show his slides of the caterpillars of Florida Butterflies. Bring your books for him to sign.

November 14, 2005—Buck and Linda Cooper, the best leppers in Florida, will give their popular presentation Butterflies and Blooms: Serendipity.



SPECIAL FEATURE:

Will the Real Firebush please stand up?

by Rufino Osorio

Firebush (*Hamelia patens* var. *patens*) is a shrub or small tree with ornamental and distinctive dark red to orange-red tubular flowers. Occasionally, there occur forms with flowers that are yellowish towards the tip. The species is wide-ranging and occurs in southern Florida in the United States, as well as throughout the Caribbean, Mexico,



and Central and South America. It is justifiably renowned for the beauty of its flowers as well as attracting a variety of larger butterflies ESPECIALLY Zebra Heliconians. From the start of native plant gardening in Florida until about 10 years ago, all of the plants of firebush found both in commerce and in cultivation were plants of *Hamelia patens* var. *patens*. However, in the



late 80s and early 90s, a new firebush arrived on the scene. It had been introduced from plants cultivated in Africa and was, at the time, commonly known as *African firebush*. Because young plants were unusually compact, it was also referred to as *dwarf firebush*. As is so often the case with common names, both names were extremely misleading. Botanically, the plant turned out to be *Hamelia patens* var. *glabra*, a variety of firebush native to Central and South America—but not occurring as a native plant in Florida or the Caribbean Basin. Once plant nurseries and gardeners realized that the plant was not native to Africa, they started calling it *dwarf firebush* or *compact firebush*. This too has turned out to be a misnomer because, with time, the plants develop open crowns and grow to be as tall as the native *Hamelia patens* var. *patens*.

Somewhere along the line, commercial nurseries stopped distinguishing *Hamelia patens* var. *glabra* from

our native *Hamelia patens* var. *patens*. Presumably because of its novelty, the non-native *Hamelia patens* var. *glabra* has caught the attention of commercial growers and is now produced in huge numbers. This, combined with the fact that it is being sold incorrectly as a “native” firebush, has led to the true native firebush being pushed out of the market and it is now difficult to find except in nurseries exclusively devoted to native plants.

However, there is no justification for confusing the two varieties since, with just a little experience, gardeners can readily learn to tell them apart. The easiest way to distinguish the true native from the non-native interloper is to take a close look at the undersides of the



Hamelia patens var. *patens*

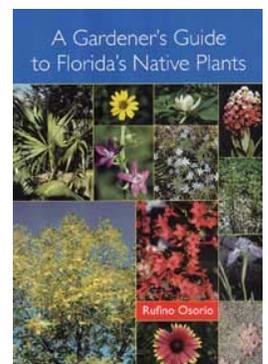


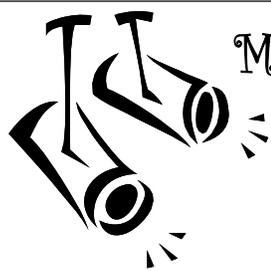
Hamelia patens var. *glabra*

leaves. The native firebush (*Hamelia patens* var. *patens*) has leaves whose lower surface is covered with minute white hairs. For most people, the hairs are readily and conspicuously visible to the naked eye or with a low power magnifying glass. In contrast, the non-native firebush (*Hamelia patens* var. *glabra*) has leaves whose lower surface is essentially hairless. This is not surprising since *glabra* is derived from the Latin word *glaber*, meaning *hairless* or *smooth*.

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Editor's Note: Rufino Osorio, a freelance writer and photographer, is the author of many articles and guides, including *A Gardener's Guide to Florida's Native Plants*. He has been responsible for introducing a wide variety of unusual and ornamental Florida native plants into horticulture and maintains 200 Florida native plants in cultivation. His collection of 8,000 color slides includes the largest number of photographs of Florida native plants in existence.





MEMBER HIGHLIGHT

Spotlight on Cynthia Plockelman



I was lucky: born and raised in Palm Beach County, at a time it was relatively undeveloped and lots of natural areas/open space. Wow, has it changed. As I was growing up, our home was situated in the middle of sand pine community, for many blocks around. We had scrub jays, gopher tortoises, pawpaws, zebra swallowtails, an occasional hummingbird wintering at our turk's cap (or Chinese hat, as you may prefer), rattlesnakes, prickly pear cactus, etc. I also remember when the first Brazilian Pepper showed up in the recently cleared lot next door and using sand pines for Christmas trees. Plus, my parents were very environmentally concerned and knew a lot about the importance of natural ecosystems, the relationships of birds, butterflies and plants. My

mother was born here in 1904 and frequently talked about the multitude of changes to the community that she had witnessed. No TV yet, so we played outdoors year round and got to see "seasonal" differences in our yards and neighborhoods. My architect father took his kids with him, when he visited his buildings in progress and we had the opportunity to see a lot of South Florida.

It was great! Still haven't figured out why I didn't become a botanist, or marine biologist, or an ornithologist—could have gone any of those directions. Instead, I did Political Science and worked for 40 years at the South Florida Water Management Dist. It sufficed to support my constant forays into the field for shells, birds, plants and butterflies. Seashells aside, birds, plants and butterflies naturally go together. Hence, most of us birders have evolved over the years, with lots of field and censusing experience, to chasing butterflies. It's a natural progression, as the saying goes.

I have friends and acquaintances all over Florida, because of involvement in the bird, plant and butterfly organizations. We have had wonderful times and I don't regret a minute of it. I would do it all over again. Zebra Swallowtail and Monarchs are still my favorite butterflies. Now, about environmental advocacy as a "retiree"—that's another story.

Editor's Note: Since retiring Cynthia has become even more involved with a variety of organizations, including the Atala Chapter of NABA, Florida Native Plant Society, Audubon Society of the Everglades, Everglades Coalition, Friends of the Loxahatchee Refuge, Florida Ornithological Society, Everglades Education Consortium, Sierra Club and Baseline Bird Surveys in the Lake Worth Lagoon.

(Mangrove Skippers —continued from page 1)

feed on grasses. But the Mangrove Skipper and others, such as the Hammock Skipper, Brazilian (Canna) Skipper, Tropical Checkered Skipper, and Long-tail Skipper feed on specific plants and have a distinctive physical appearance as adults.



The Mangrove Skipper is the largest skipper in Florida and may be mistakenly identified as a true butterfly because of its size and form. Both sexes appear similar with the male distinguished by its narrow costal folds.

Since the Mangrove Skipper larvae feed on red mangroves, you can see them along estuaries in the warmer coastal areas of Florida. Rick Cech notes, however, that strays have been seen as far north as South Carolina. They can be seen most of the year here in Palm Beach County and sometimes can be abundant, but they do have population swings. Males fly high searching for mates, and females stay closer to the ground laying eggs, nectaring, and perching on flowers.

Although there are no current conservation concerns for the Mangrove Skipper, they are susceptible to habitat loss and chemical pesticides, like all butterflies. Mosquito spraying and other pesticide use always threaten butterfly species. Brazilian pepper, a non-native invasive plant, overcomes mangroves, par-

ticularly during years of extreme cold weather because red mangroves are susceptible to freezes and peppers will proliferate as mangroves dieback. There are laws protecting red mangroves from removal and severe pruning, but much of the mangrove forest has already been lost to earlier development on barrier islands and the coastal mainland. Natural areas, such as Blowing Rocks Preserve on Jupiter Island and John D. MacArthur Beach State Park on Singer Island, are good places to see these beautiful skippers. But remember, they are strong flyers and sometimes take a "fly-about" to visit butterfly gardens.

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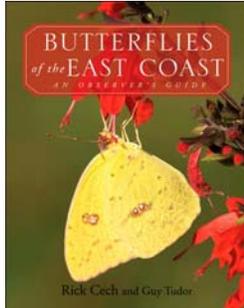
Books of Interest.....

with commentary from Amazon

Butterflies of the East Coast : An Observer's Guide by Rick Cech & Guy Tudor

Rick Cech is a seasoned field observer who has spent years studying and photographing East Coast butterflies. His substantial first-hand experience with both the common and rare species in the region adds much depth and new insight to the commentary.

- 234 full-page species accounts and accompanying range maps
- 950 large-size color photos
- 215 photos of individual host plants and habitats
- 735 high-quality photos of butterflies and caterpillars
- Introductory chapters detailing the subtle ecology of the East Coast region
- An overview of current scientific literature and observational findings
- Descriptions of diapause and host plant strategies and defensive chemistry, and
- User-friendly with clear, concise text



Florida Butterfly Caterpillars and their Host Plants by Marc Minno, Jerry F. Butler and Donald W. Hall.

Florida's mild climate and diversity of plants create the perfect environment in which caterpillars thrive. The state has a rich and unusual butterfly fauna consisting of temperate species from eastern North America, tropical species from the Caribbean region, and unique races that are found nowhere else. For everyone who has wondered what to do about the caterpillars they find munching on a beloved plant, the authors of Florida Butterfly Caterpillars and Their Host Plants offer this advice: "Watch them."

In this first comprehensive guide, butterfly experts Marc C. Minno, Jerry F. Butler, and Donald W. Hall have compiled everything you need to know about these diverse and productive members of Florida's ecosystem. They cover caterpillar anatomy, biology, ecology, habitat, behavior, and defense, as well as how to find, identify, and raise caterpillars. Distinct, detailed photos reveal 167 species of caterpillars, 185 plants, 18 life cycles, and 19 habitats.



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atala@prodigy.net for updates on
butterfly related topics and events
throughout the year!*

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