

# Badger Butterfly

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

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

## 1 NEXT SWBA MEETING:

**Tuesday, March 1**

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

### Program: Butterflies on Stamps

Speaker: Dreux Watermolen, WDNR



Scientists have described approximately 20,000 species of butterflies worldwide, ranging from tiny skippers to large swallowtails. Their brightly colored wings and generally conspicuous, fluttering flight have often captured the imaginations of poets, authors, and other creative types. Artistic depictions of butterflies have appeared in many cultures, including Egyptian hieroglyphs dating back 3500 years. Today, butterfly-themed artworks abound (some even incorporate real butterflies).

Of particular note is the wide range of postage stamps and related philatelic items that feature these insects. Nations around the world have depicted butterflies on more than 8,800 different stamps! Join us to explore this wonderful diversity of butterflies, both as they occur in nature and as they are depicted on world postage stamps.



**Everyone is welcome to attend this free program.** The meeting will last from 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. We will have door prizes, displays, books, handouts and plenty of time afterwards to enjoy snacks and refreshments, and talk with our speaker 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.

#### IN THIS ISSUE:

1. **NEXT SWBA MEETING ON MARCH 1, 2011.**
2. **FIELD TRIPS IN 2011.**
3. **Arboretum Butterfly Class.**
4. **Butterfly Gardening Class.**
5. **Ann Thering Photo Exhibit.**
6. **Add Some Butterfly Plants.**
7. **Nabakov, Blues & N. America.**
8. **Karner Blue Now a Species.**
9. **Update on Monarch Numbers.**



## 2 SWBA FIELD TRIPS SCHEDULE FOR 2011

Mark your calendars!

Saturday	May 21	Butterflies of Bauer-Brockway Barrens	Mike Reese
Saturday	June 18	Butterflies of Pleasant Valley	Ann Thering
Saturday	June 25	Butterflies of Cherokee Marsh	Kathy Kirk
Saturday	July 2	Madison Butterfly Count	Karl and Dorothy Legler
Monday	July 4	Butterflies and Dragonflies of Swamp Lover's Preserve	Tod Highsmith and Leglers
Sunday	July 16	Pretty Things With Wings at Lakeshore Preserve	Edgar Spalding

Saturday	August 13	Butterflies at Avoca and Lower Wis. Riverway	Mike Reese
Saturday	August 27	Butterflies and Blossoms at Pheasant Branch	Dreux Watermolen
Saturday	September 3	Grasshoppers!	Kathy Kirk
Sunday	September 4	Monarchs	Karl and Dorothy Legler

### 3 ARBORETUM CLASS: BUTTERFLIES IN WISCONSIN

**Thursday, March 10 • 9 am – 11:30 am**

Butterfly enthusiast and photographer Ann Thering will guide us through identification and natural history of many of the 150+ species of butterflies in Wisconsin. Tips on finding butterflies, what you can do to conserve butterflies, and some notes on rearing leps will also be covered. Ann, who has a master's degree in biology, spends as much time as

possible seeking butterflies and other insects in the prairies, woods, and wetlands of Wisconsin. She is a founding member of the Southern Wisconsin Butterfly Association, and exhibits her photography around the state.

**The class costs \$5. You can register and pay online at <http://uwarboretum.org/events/?cats=2>;**

### 4 CLASS OFFERED AT OLBRICH GARDENS: “WINGS AND PETALS: BUTTERFLY GARDENING IN SOUTHERN WISCONSIN”

Learn how to attract magnificent butterflies to your yard with butterfly enthusiast and Photographer Ann Thering. Good nectar sources for butterflies and food plants for their caterpillars will be covered, emphasizing native plants. Some horticultural varieties will also be discussed. You

will learn key butterfly gardening design features, and how to identify common backyard butterflies and their caterpillars. The class fee includes a milkweed plant (plug size) for your garden provided by Agrecol Corporation of Madison, grower of Midwest native plants and seeds.

**Wednesday, May 11, 7-8:30 p.m.**

**Registration Deadline:** May 4

**Cost:** \$15/\$12 member | **Course Number:** 10-30

See registration details at Olbrich's web site: [www.olbrich.org/education/classes.cfm](http://www.olbrich.org/education/classes.cfm)

### 5 PHOTO EXHIBIT AT OAKWOOD VILLAGE

From March 1 to April 29, Ann Thering's photo exhibit, "Pretty Things with Wings", will be at Oakwood Village West, 6205 Mineral Point Road in Madison. It presents 30 images of bugs you will want to get a closer look at!

### 6 ADD SOME BUTTERFLY PLANTS TO YOUR GARDEN!

**By Dorothy Legler**

My husband and I spent some weeks in South Texas this winter. I was so elated to attend a local garden club meeting, since I was missing a club meeting in Wisconsin. It was a nice surprise to discover that their speaker was giving a PowerPoint presentation on butterfly gardening. It was very similar to the program that I give except some of the native flowers and butterflies don't occur in Wisconsin.

She and I both recommend that you plant both host (caterpillar food) plants and nectar plants to

attract the most butterflies. You don't have to have a huge area. Just start adding some butterfly-attracting plants to your existing gardens, or add some in containers. Include milkweeds such as Swamp Milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*), Butterfly Weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) and various asters such as New England Aster (*Symphylorichum novae-angliae*). Plant parsley, dill, fennel and other carrot family members for Black Swallowtails. For nectar plants include butterfly bush, zinnias, pentas, phlox and monarda. Two of my favorite annuals are

Bloodflower (*Asclepias curassavica*) and Verbena bonariensis. Remember that native plants usually produce more nectar than hybrids.

Try to include a moist area so that the butterflies can sip nutrients from the soil. In a sunny area put some stones or a mulched area so they can warm themselves. Not all butterflies nectar at flowers so provide over-ripe fruit. Watermelon rinds are great. Don't use pesticides.

We have seen 12 butterfly species in south central Texas in February in spite of a hard freeze. Not many plants are growing and blooming there yet. (Some annuals were blooming in the San Antonio Botanical Gardens such as pansies, snapdragons, stocks and cyclamen.)

Last year on March 17, 2010 we saw our first butterfly in Wisconsin – a Mourning Cloak. So it won't be long before the butterflies are flying again!

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## 7 WHEN THE BLUES CAME TO AMERICA: Nabokov Theory on Butterfly Evolution Is Vindicated!

**(Thanks to Stan Rehm and Charles Behnke for calling our attention to this article.)**

Vladimir Nabokov is the author of famous novels such as “Lolita” and “Pale Fire.” Yet while he was writing those books, Nabokov had another life as a self-taught authority on Lepidoptera.

He was the curator of Lepidoptera at the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University and studied butterflies throughout the U.S. Nabokov published scientific descriptions of numerous species of butterfly. And in 1945 he wrote an article that presented a grand picture of the evolution of the butterflies he studied, the *Polyommatus* blues. He contended that the blues came to North America from Asia over a land

bridge between the two continents. And Nabokov said this occurred over millions of years in a number of waves.

For the most part, other lepidopterists did not give his ideas much credence while he was alive. Nabokov died in 1977 but he has gradually grown in the estimation of other lepidopterists. Now, over the past decade, a group of scientists have investigated his claim about the origin of North American blues, using gene-sequencing techniques. In January, in the Proceedings of the Royal Society of London, they concluded that Nabokov was absolutely right!

**To read the full article and learn more about the remarkable Vladimir Nabokov and the movements of blues click on**

[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/01/science/01butterfly.html?\\_r=2&pagewanted=1&ref=science](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/01/science/01butterfly.html?_r=2&pagewanted=1&ref=science)

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## 8 New evidence that the Federally Endangered Karner Blue is a separate species

Background: The Karner Blue (*Lycaedes melissa samuelis*) is a small butterfly, with a wingspan of about one inch. The Karner Blue was federally listed as an endangered species in 1992. Although the species is rare nationwide, it is more common in Wisconsin, particularly where pine barrens, oak savannas, and mowed corridors support wild lupine, the only food of the Karner Blue caterpillar. Wild lupine is a beautiful purple wildflower that thrives in the central and northwestern portions of the state. The Karner Blue has been regarded as a **subspecies** of the Mellissa Blue. The following is an excerpt from the above article on blues:

“In 1944 . . . Nabokov published the first description of the Karner blue butterfly, a rare form that lives in the northeastern United States. Judging from its color and choice of plants to eat, Nabokov came to believe that it was a distinct species. But when scientists began to analyze its genes, they decided it was just part of an existing species, the Melissa blue (*Lycaedes melissa*).”

“Chris Nice of Texas State University and his colleagues recently used next-generation sequencing to get a far more detailed look at the DNA of Karner blues and their relatives. They found that Karner blues and Melissa blues actually trade very few genes. In their December 2010 report in *Biology Letters*, they declare that Karner blues are a separate species after all – and Nabokov gets credit for recognizing it.”



## 9 UPDATE ON THE OVERWINTERING MONARCH POPULATION

Monarchs are famously migratory, flying south to central Mexico in the fall and overwintering in a small area in the mountains. They migrate north in spring and subsequent generations reach Wisconsin and southern Canada, completing the yearly cycle. In the winter of 2009/10, the count at the overwintering site was the lowest in the 15 years that they have been monitored. But even worse, the area experienced storms that further took a serious toll on the Monarchs. We have mentioned these facts in various articles in The Badger ButterFlyer and concluded, from several NABA counts in Wisconsin, that in 2010 Monarchs were making a record-breaking comeback. But the total population comes from all of eastern North America. Would the total population have a substantial increase?

Now there is finally a population estimate on the Monarchs for this winter. (There are too many

butterflies to count so the populations are determined by measuring the *area* they occupy.) The results indicate that the Monarchs have slightly more than doubled their population from the previous winter. That is very good news!

Even so, the population is still relatively low compared to other years so it would really be nice if they could make further gains this year. 2010 was an ideal year for butterflies in Wisconsin but what will 2011 bring?

One negative factor Monarchs could be facing this year is significant drought in Texas this spring. Texas is a bottleneck for Monarchs. The Monarchs must produce their first generation utilizing the milkweeds of Texas. Drought can impact milkweed abundance and health and so also the success of Monarchs in Texas. Stay tuned!

### What Can We Do? Here Are Some Things!

- ❖ For our part, we can continue to plant various milkweeds (the caterpillar food plant) in gardens because the milkweed abundance has declined due to habitat destruction and extensive roadside mowing. And we can encourage others to plant milkweeds.
- ❖ We can also watch the Monarchs as they move north using the web site Journey North:  
<http://www.learner.org/jnorth/monarch/>
- ❖ We can contribute to organizations that specifically help Monarchs, such as Monarch Watch.  
<http://www.monarchwatch.org/>
- ❖ We can submit our butterfly sightings to [www.wisconsinbutterflies.org](http://www.wisconsinbutterflies.org) and we can follow the unfolding of the butterfly year on the same web site.
- ❖ We can participate in NABA butterfly counts to help monitor the ups and downs of species abundance. (We will list some of these in future issues of Badger ButterFlyer.)  
<http://www.naba.org/counts/maps08.html>
- ❖ We can also participate in the important “citizen science” Monarch Larva Monitoring Project <http://www.mlmp.org/>

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

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