



Jim Mori

# Can NABA Make a Butterfly Count?

by Jane Hurwitz

## As the NABA Butterfly Count Program turns thirty-five

this year, it is probably too early for a mid-life crisis, but like any milestone birthday, it is a good time to celebrate how the program got this far and ponder what good things the future might hold.

The first counts were held in 1975 after Sally Pyle, suggested an annual event be held that would help to increase public awareness of insect conservation. The first year of the program saw 29 counts, which were organized and published by the Xerces Society. By 2008, the program had grown to 474 counts.

The growth of the count program is due to the rapid growth of butterflying over the past 16 years (in large part due to NABA) and also to the dedication of its volunteers, many of whom have donated countless hours over the years as counters, compilers, and regional editors.

One person who has worn a wide variety of hats in the count program is Ann Swengel, who started her first counts in 1986 with her husband Scott Swengel, acted as a regional editor from 1987 through 2001, and was count co-editor from 1991 through 2004.

## NABA Butterfly Count Timeline

- 1975 - In the first year of the count program, 29 counts were organized and published by Xerces Society.
- 1976 - Editors of the count report varied during the early years; Mary Hathaway, Ira Heller, Jerry A. Powell, Sally Pyle, Lorraine L. Rothman, J.T. Sorenson.
- 1982 - Paul A. Opler begins as co-editor of the count report. Jerry A. Powell is co-editor through 1986.
- 1984 - At 10 years old, there were 48 counts from 18 states and one Canadian province
- 1986 - Was the first year that Regional Editors worked on the count, although there were only three.
- 1987 - John W. Brown joins Paul Opler as count report co-editor through 1990.
- 1991 - Ann Swengel joins Paul Opler as count report co-editor with 10 regional editors
- 1993 - Xerces transfers Count Program and it is incorporated into NABA.  
At 19 years old, 211 counts and 1653 participants were published. The count report was divided into 25 regions each with a regional editor.
- 1994 - At 20 years old there were 249 counts and 2106 participants.
- 1996 - Mark Fairbrother compiles Table 2 in the Count Report (and continues to do so until the online count system is instituted in 2008).
- 1997 - Count reports switch from using scientific names to English names.
- 1999 - For the 25 year count anniversary co-editor Ann Swengel published accounts from compilers of long term counts in the Introduction of the 1999 Count Report.
- 2001 - Co-editor Ann Swengel prints a tribute in the count report introduction to Paul Opler's dedication to the program as volunteer co-editor from 1982 through 2000. He guided the program through its transition from a small program in the 1970s to an ever larger and still growing program through the 1980s and 1990s.
- 2004 - At 30 years old there were 467 counts, 3934 observers.
- 2005 - Sharon Wander starts as current Count Editor.
- 2006 - 508 counts were published, an all time high for the count program.
- 2007 - Seasonal counts added to the count program for United States and Mexico.
- 2008 - NABA launches online data entry system spearheaded by NABA Vice President Jim Springer, programmed by Redshift Technologies, and funding support provided by the National Biological Information Infrastructure Funding. In the first year of operation, 67% of counts were filed online.
- 2009 - NABA encourages online data entry and hopes to exceed the 2006 record of 508 counts for the year.

*Opposite page: A view of the eastern boundary of the Dardanelles count circle, showing arctic-alpine habitats by Sonora Pass. Here, butterflies such as Sheridan's Hairstreak and Sooty Hairstreak are found, along with an unusual population of blues that seems intermediate between Melissa and Northern Blues.*